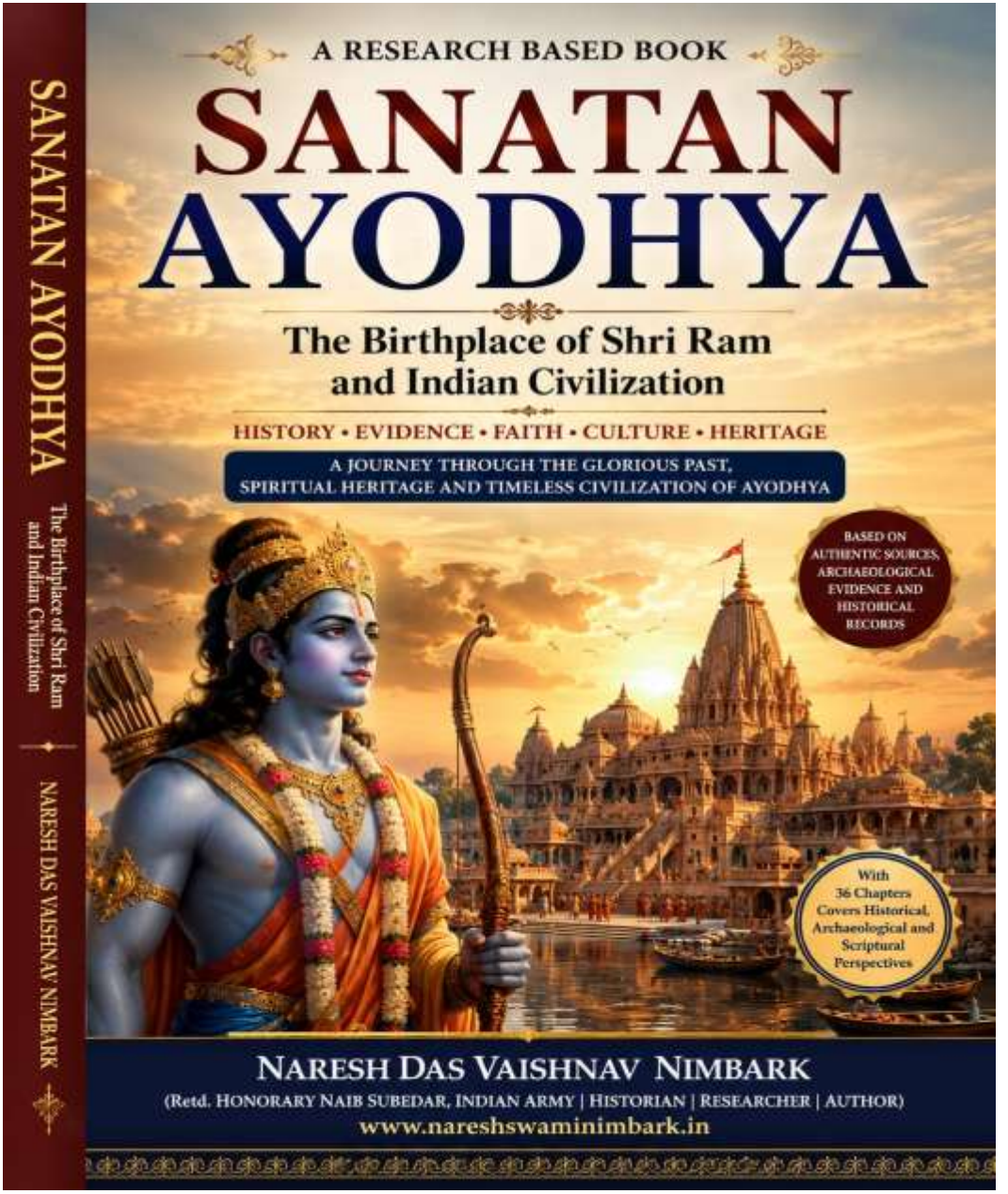
SANATAN AYODHYA
The Birthplace of Shri Ram and Indian Civilization
NARESH DAS VAISHNAV NIMBARK
A RESEARCH BASED BOOK
SANATAN AYODHYA
The Birthplace of Shri Ram and Indian Civilization
HISTORY • EVIDENCE • FAITH • CULTURE • HERITAGE
A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GLORIOUS PAST, SPIRITUAL HERITAGE AND TIMELESS CIVILIZATION OF AYODHYA
BASED ON AUTHENTIC SOURCES, ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND HISTORICAL RECORDS
With 36 Chapters Covers Historical, Archaeological and Scriptural Perspectives
NARESH DAS VAISHNAV NIMBARK
(Retd. HONORARY NAIB SUBEDAR, INDIAN ARMY | HISTORIAN | RESEARCHER | AUTHOR)
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Dedication

This research work is respectfully dedicated to the eternal cultural, spiritual, and historical heritage of Ayodhya – a heritage that has made an unparalleled contribution to the making, preservation, and evolution of Indian civilization across millennia.

This work is also offered as a humble and grateful tribute to all the known and unknown sages, saints, teachers, historians, archaeologists, epigraphists, scholars, and researchers, as well as to all custodians of India's knowledge tradition, whose research, devotion, and tireless efforts have played a vital role in understanding and preserving the history, culture, and civilization of Ayodhya.

Inspired by the spirit of truth, evidence, and impartial historical writing, this research work is humbly dedicated to the preservation and study of the priceless heritage of Indian civilization, and to the transmission of its authentic knowledge to future generations.

|| May this be offered at the feet of Shri Sita-Ramchandra ||

Copyright

SANATAN AYODHYA: The Birthplace of Shri Ram and Indian Civilization

Author

Naresh Das Vaishnav Nimbark

(Retired Honorary Naib Subedar, Indian Army | Historian | Researcher | Author)

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This is a work of research. The facts, views, and conclusions presented herein are based on available historical, literary, archaeological, and other authentic sources, as well as on the author's independent study, field visits, and research. The purpose

of this book is to present an evidence-based study of the history of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Shri Ram, and Indian civilization. Scholarly opinions on any subject may differ, and all such views are fully respected.

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Foreword

Ayodhya is not merely the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram – it is an eternal centre of Indian civilization, culture, spirituality, and the Sanatan tradition. The Vedas, the Puranas, the Ramayana, Buddhist and Jain literature, inscriptions, archaeological evidence, and the collective consciousness of the Indian people have all accorded Ayodhya a unique and unparalleled place. For millennia, this city has remained a confluence of devotion, spiritual practice, culture, and history. The present research work is a humble attempt to present, before readers, the evidence-based history, cultural heritage, and facts associated with the birthplace of Shri Ram, in a fair and impartial manner.

My connection with Ayodhya is not merely that of a pilgrim, but also that of a researcher. My first visit to Ayodhya took place in 1988, during my service in the Indian Army, in the company of my fellow soldiers. The purpose of that visit was devotional, but the sanctity and historical significance of Ayodhya left a deep impression on my mind.

My second visit took place in 1990, with one of my army comrades. At that time, the atmosphere in Ayodhya was of great historical significance. This visit further strengthened my curiosity to understand the history of Ayodhya on the basis of evidence.

My third visit began on 19 October 2021, accompanied by my wife. We departed from Delhi and reached Ayodhya on 20 October 2021. During this visit, alongside devotional observance, I studied several historical sites, temples, and traditions. A detailed account of this journey has been published in my autobiographical book “Bandook Se Kalam Tak” (From the Rifle to the Pen), pages 70–71. In the present research work, that journey is referenced only briefly, as the purpose of this book is to present a comprehensive historical study of Ayodhya.

My fourth research visit to Ayodhya will now commence on 7 September 2026. I will be accompanied on this research journey by Master Jagbir Vaishnav and Shri Deepak Swami from Haridwar, Uttarakhand. We shall depart from Delhi on 7 September and reach Ayodhya at 6:20 a.m. on 8 September. Over four days, our objective will be to study and document the historical sites, ancient temples, ghats, monasteries (maths), akharas, research institutions, inscriptions, archaeological evidence, and, in particular, the sites associated with the Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi tradition.

This research work will follow a pre-determined research methodology. Approximately 95% of its content will be based on authentic historical sources — ancient texts, archaeological evidence, inscriptions, epigraphic records, research papers, and

the works of eminent historians. Where two or more historians hold differing views on any subject, all major viewpoints will be presented impartially, together with their original sources. No single view will be presented as the final or absolute truth.

The remaining approximately 5% of the content will be based on my research journeys, direct observations, and local oral traditions. Wherever such oral tradition (jan-shruti) is referenced, it will be clearly identified as either “oral tradition” or “the author's travel account,” and not presented as historical evidence.

This research work shall neither resort to imagination nor exaggerate any fact. Conclusions will be drawn only to the extent that evidence supports them; and where evidence is not available, this will be stated with equal clarity – that no conclusive historical evidence exists on that particular subject.

The purpose of this book is not commercial gain or profit from its sale. My sole objective is to present, before society, evidence-based facts relating to the ancient cultural heritage of Sanatan Bharat, the birthplace of Shri Ram, the history of Ayodhya, and the Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi tradition, with honesty, impartiality, and a research-oriented perspective. If this work proves to be a useful reference for future researchers, students, and readers interested in the study of Sanatan culture, I shall consider this endeavour successful.

A Word from the Author

Dear Readers,

“Sanatan Ayodhya: The Birthplace of Shri Ram and Indian Civilization” is not merely a book – it is the outcome of many years of curiosity, study, research, travel, and the pursuit of evidence. The very mention of Ayodhya evokes the devotion of millions towards Lord Shri Ram. Yet, as a researcher, my responsibility has not been merely to describe that devotion, but to present the truth before readers on the basis of available historical, literary, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence.

My visits to Ayodhya took place in 1988, 1990, 2021, and, as a fourth research journey, in 2026. Each visit taught me something new. The experiences gathered from temples, ghats, monasteries, akharas, saints, research institutions, and local traditions have enriched this work.

In writing this book, my endeavour has been that approximately 95 percent of the content should be grounded in authentic historical sources. Wherever historians hold differing views, rather than treating any single opinion as the final truth, an effort has been made to present all major viewpoints together with their sources. The remaining content is based on my direct

observations, research journeys, and clearly identified oral traditions.

I do not claim that every conclusion presented in this book is final. History is a subject of continuous research. Should new inscriptions, epigraphic records, archaeological evidence, or proof come to light in the future, they ought to be welcomed. The pursuit of truth is never complete; it is an ever-continuing process.

I have had the privilege of serving in the Indian Army for 24 years. That service instilled in me the values of discipline, impartiality, and devotion to the nation. Since retirement, I have endeavoured to bring that same discipline to historical writing and research. It is my conviction that the honour of history can be preserved only when it is written honestly, on the foundation of evidence.

This work has been written neither for commercial purposes nor for financial gain. My sole objective is to present an evidence-based study of the cultural and historical heritage of Sanatan Bharat, and to carry it forward to present and future generations. If this book assists any student, researcher, historian, or general reader in understanding the history of Ayodhya, I shall consider this endeavour worthwhile.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the scholars, historians, archaeologists, saints, libraries, archives, and collaborators whose

work and guidance have, directly or indirectly, assisted in the completion of this research work.

By the grace of Lord Shri Ram, this humble endeavour is offered before you all.

Jai Shri Ram. Jai Sanatan. Jai Bharat.

– Naresh Das Vaishnav Nimbark

Retired Honorary Naib Subedar, Indian Army

Historian | Researcher | Author

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CHAPTER 1

Ayodhya: Name, Meaning, Antiquity, and Geographical Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The history of India's ancient civilization is not merely the history of kings, wars, and political boundaries. An important current of Indian history is preserved in the memory of those cities and pilgrim sites that shaped religious, cultural, and social life over thousands of years. Ayodhya stands as an exceptionally important centre within this tradition.

In the Indian popular consciousness, the name Ayodhya is most closely associated with Lord Shri Ram. In the Ramayana and in the religious traditions that followed, Ayodhya was established as the capital of the Ikshvaku or Solar dynasty, the city of Maharaja Dasharatha, and the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram. Alongside this, the region also finds mention in Buddhist and Jain traditions. In the historical period, Ayodhya and its surrounding region remained part of the political and cultural activity of northern India.

To write the history of Ayodhya, therefore, is not merely to write the history of a city. It is an attempt to understand the interrelationships between the long-enduring memory of Indian

civilization, religious tradition, literature, geography, archaeology, and political history.

This chapter offers an initial introduction to the name of Ayodhya and its meaning, its presence in ancient literature, its relationship with Saketa, its position within the Kosala region, its connection with the river Sarayu, and the archaeological and historical evidence concerning it.

1.2 The Meaning of the Name 'Ayodhya'

The word 'Ayodhya' is generally held to derive from the Sanskrit root 'yudh'. In the common etymological explanation, it refers to a place that is difficult to war against, or one that cannot be conquered by war.

From this perspective, 'Ayodhya' is understood in the general sense of the invincible — that which cannot be conquered, or that which is difficult to defeat in battle.

This etymology of the name also accords with the cultural imagination surrounding Ayodhya. In Indian tradition, an ideal capital was never merely a place of residence; it was also the centre of the state's power, order, prosperity, and religious standing.

However, it is necessary for the historian to keep linguistic meaning and historical fact distinct. That a city's name means

'invincible' is not, in itself, direct archaeological proof that it was in fact an unconquerable military fortress in any particular period. This meaning should therefore be regarded as the etymology of the name, and not, by itself, as historical military evidence.

1.3 Ayodhya: A City and a Cultural Memory

The distinctiveness of Ayodhya lies in the fact that its history has never been confined to the physical city alone. It also became an important centre of Indian religious memory.

In the Hindu tradition, Ayodhya is held to be the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram. The identity of Ayodhya is deeply bound up with the life of Shri Ram, the reign of Dasharatha, the exile in the forest, the renunciation of Bharat, the return of Ram, and the concept of Ram Rajya.

This religious memory did not allow Ayodhya to remain merely an ancient royal city; it also established it as a place of pilgrimage. In later periods, with the growth of devotion to Ram, the religious significance of Ayodhya expanded still further.

Modern scholars, too, have observed that Ayodhya's development as a religious centre occurred through a series of distinct historical phases. Hans T. Bakker's extensive study of Ayodhya examines its history, and its development as a sacred centre, from the seventh century BCE through to the eighteenth century.

1.4 Ayodhya and Kosala

In ancient Indian tradition, Ayodhya is associated with Kosala. In the Ramayana, Ayodhya is presented as the capital of Kosala.

Kosala held an important place among the ancient political regions of northern India. In later Buddhist literature, too, Kosala is mentioned as a powerful political territory.

Here the historian confronts an important question: can the Kosala described in the Ramayana be regarded as precisely the same political structure as the Kosala of later history?

The answer is not straightforward. The composition of the literature, the development of its various layers, and the changes in political geography — all of these must be taken into account.

This treatise will therefore examine the relationship between Kosala and Ayodhya at three levels: first, the literary tradition of the Ramayana; second, the historical political geography as it appears in Buddhist and Jain literature; and third, archaeological and epigraphic evidence.

1.5 Ayodhya in the Ramayana

Among the literary sources concerning Ayodhya, the Valmiki Ramayana holds a position of the utmost importance.

The Bala Kanda of the Ramayana offers a detailed description of Ayodhya. The city is described as vast, prosperous, and well-ordered. It contains descriptions of the royal palace, thoroughfares, buildings, gardens, marketplaces, and the civic and royal administration.

As the capital of Maharaja Dasharatha, Ayodhya is presented as an ideal royal city. This description is not merely architectural; it also embodies a vision of ideal governance, in which king, subject, dharma, and the duties of kingship are bound together.

In understanding the Ayodhya of the Ramayana, an important historical caution must be observed. The literary description in the Ramayana constitutes literary evidence; it is not, in itself, the report of an archaeological excavation.

This does not mean that the Ramayana is unimportant for historical study. On the contrary, it is an extremely important source for understanding ancient Indian cultural memory and the traditional identity of Ayodhya. But to fix the historical date of any particular building, road, or structure, independent archaeological evidence would also be required.

1.6 The Ikshvaku and Solar Dynasty Tradition

In Indian religious literature, Ayodhya is linked to the Ikshvaku dynasty and the Solar lineage.

In the tradition of the Ramayana, Lord Shri Ram is established as the foremost king of this very lineage. Later Puranas, too, contain detailed accounts of the genealogies of the Solar dynasty.

This dynastic tradition is of great importance in Indian cultural history. However, it would not be proper to treat every name in the genealogy as verified political history in the modern sense.

In ancient Indian genealogies, religious, cultural, and dynastic memory have often been preserved together. The historicity of each genealogy must therefore be examined separately, on the basis of its own sources.

Nineteenth-century historiography, too, exercised caution on this subject. B. H. Baden-Powell considered the genealogies of the Ramayana and the Puranas to be important evidence for the 'Solar' dynasty of Ayodhya, while also regarding Buddhist literature as useful for the study of this subject.

This treatise will therefore neither accept the Ikshvaku-Solar lineage as historical record without examination, nor reject it merely because modern archaeological confirmation is not available for every one of its stages.

1.7 Ayodhya and Saketa: An Important Historical Question

One of the most complex questions in the history of Ayodhya is this: was the ancient 'Saketa' the same city that later tradition called Ayodhya?

This question appears simple, but behind it lies a long history of scholarly debate.

Saketa is mentioned in Buddhist literature. In the study of ancient Indian history, Saketa has been regarded as an important city. But modern scholars have differed over its identification.

A study by W. Vost, published in 1905 in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, records the long-standing dispute over the true location of Saketa. By that time, various sites had been proposed for its identification, and the author acknowledged that the question of decisive proof remained complex.

Similarly, in earlier historiography, Alexander Cunningham identified Saketa with Ayodhya, but later scholars raised objections to this identification. Another historical discussion published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society records criticism of Cunningham's identification.

From this we derive an important principle of historiography: a well-known historical identification cannot be treated as final truth merely because it was accepted by one celebrated historian. That

identification must also be tested against later evidence and criticism.

1.8 Were Ayodhya and Saketa Always the Same Name?

This question must be answered with care.

According to one view, Ayodhya and Saketa may have been different names for the same wider urban area. According to another perspective, it is necessary to understand the historical usage of the two names separately.

There was considerable debate among earlier scholars on this subject. Some studies identified Saketa with Ayodhya, while other scholars considered the available evidence insufficient for this.

The approach of this treatise will be as follows: 'Where scholars differ, that difference will not be concealed.'

To reach a final conclusion on the relationship between Ayodhya and Saketa, it is necessary to consider together the literary references, topographical evidence, archaeological evidence, inscriptions, and travel accounts.

1.9 Ayodhya Region in Buddhist Tradition

Kosala and its associated cities occupy an extremely important place in Buddhist literature. In the time of the Buddha, the great

janapadas of northern India were major centres of political and religious activity.

Saketa, too, appears within this broad historical landscape. An earlier study in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society describes Saketa as a renowned place from the time of the Buddha until roughly the fourth century CE.

It is important to understand here that a place's mention in Buddhist literature does not, by itself, make that place solely a Buddhist city. Many religious traditions could coexist within the same ancient Indian cities.

In the history of Ayodhya, too, this plurality must be kept in view.

1.10 Jain Tradition and Ayodhya

Ayodhya also holds an extremely important religious place in Jain tradition. Jain tradition connects Ayodhya with the birthplace of the Tirthankaras and accords it a place among the principal pilgrimage sites.

This makes clear that the religious standing of Ayodhya was never confined to the Ram narrative alone. Different Indian religious traditions accorded this land a place within their own respective religious memories.

This fact makes Ayodhya still more significant for the wider study of Indian civilization.

A detailed study of the Jain tradition will be undertaken later, in Chapter 10 of this treatise. It is mentioned here so that the multi-layered religious identity of Ayodhya may be made clear at the outset.

1.11 Ayodhya and the Sarayu River

The river Sarayu occupies an extremely important place in the geographical identity of Ayodhya.

In the Ramayana and in the religious traditions that followed, the Sarayu appears inseparably linked with Ayodhya. This relationship between city and river was not merely religious. Rivers played an extremely important role in the development of ancient cities.

The availability of water from the river assisted agriculture, transport, trade, and the growth of human settlements. Understanding Ayodhya's position on the banks of the Sarayu is therefore necessary for understanding its historical development.

In later periods, the Sarayu itself came to be established as a sacred place of pilgrimage. Traditions of bathing, ghats, religious ritual, and pilgrimage further strengthened the religious identity of Ayodhya.

A detailed study of the Sarayu will be undertaken in Chapter 27 of this book.

1.12 The Geographical Significance of Ayodhya

Ayodhya is situated in the Awadh region of present-day Uttar Pradesh. Its modern geographical form provides a basis for the study of historical Ayodhya, but modern administrative boundaries cannot be treated as equivalent to ancient political boundaries.

In ancient India, the boundaries of kingdoms were not fixed by stable administrative lines in the manner of modern districts and states. When we speak, therefore, of 'Kosala', 'Ayodhya', or 'Saketa', it is necessary to understand their geographical extent on the basis of the sources belonging to the relevant period.

1.13 The Archaeological Antiquity of Ayodhya

A discussion of Ayodhya's history cannot be completed on the basis of religious literature alone. Archaeology, too, has played an important role in the study of this region.

The Archaeological Survey of India and other archaeological studies have carried out archaeological investigation of Ayodhya and of sites associated with the Ramayana. Material published by the Archaeological Survey of India makes mention of archaeological work undertaken at Ayodhya and at other sites connected with the Ramayana.

Archaeology is important because it offers the opportunity to understand a place's past on the basis of its material culture –

earthen vessels, architectural remains, the strata of human settlement, coins, metal objects, bricks, and other artefacts.

But archaeology, too, has its limits. The discovery of an ancient settlement at a site may establish that human habitation existed there at some period; but that fact alone does not establish the identification of any particular religious event or person.

Similarly, the discovery of the remains of a structure may constitute important evidence, but its identification requires architecture, inscriptions, dating, and other independent forms of evidence.

1.14 The Need to Read Archaeology and Literature Together

In the case of Ayodhya, the most useful research method will be one in which literature and archaeology are treated not as alternatives to one another, but as complementary sources.

For example – the Ramayana gives us the literary and cultural image of Ayodhya. The Puranas give us material on religious tradition and genealogy. Buddhist and Jain literature give us knowledge of the region from the perspective of other religious communities. Inscriptions can provide direct material on the political or religious history of a particular period. Archaeology provides evidence of material culture and human habitation. Travel accounts can provide an outside observer's description of the

condition of the city, its religious sites, and its social life at a particular period.

Only by holding all of these together can a multidimensional history of Ayodhya be constructed.

1.15 The Development of Ayodhya's Religious Identity

It would not be historically sound to assume that the religious identity of Ayodhya developed fully at any single moment.

The development of religious cities generally occurs over a long span of time. The narrative associated with a place, its pilgrimage tradition, temples, the tradition of saints, religious literature, journeys, and royal patronage – all of these together transform a city into a place of pilgrimage.

In Ayodhya, too, the ancient memory of the Ram narrative, Vaishnav devotion, the tradition of saints, the development of monasteries and akharas, and the tradition of pilgrimage together strengthened its religious identity.

The particular importance of Hans Bakker's study lies precisely in this: rather than confining the history of Ayodhya to the period of the Ramayana narrative alone, he studied its development, in the periods that followed, as a sacred centre.

1.16 Ayodhya and the Vaishnav Tradition

The modern religious character of Ayodhya is deeply bound up with the Vaishnav tradition.

In particular, the various currents of devotion to Ram made Ayodhya their principal centre. The traditions of saints, ascetics, monasteries, and akharas gave broad shape to the religious life of the city.

The Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi tradition has made an important contribution to the religious history of Ayodhya. This subject is given special importance in this book, and it will be examined in detail in Chapters 15, 16, and 31.

Here it is enough to note that the religious history of Ayodhya is not confined to any single sect. The historical contacts and influences of many Vaishnav, Shaiva, Shakta, Jain, Buddhist, and other religious traditions must be studied here.

1.17 Ayodhya in Historiography

Modern historiography on Ayodhya is not uniform.

Some scholars regard the religious traditions of Ayodhya as an important source of Indian cultural memory. Some scholars give priority to archaeological and epigraphic evidence. Some studies have attempted to establish the relationship between literary tradition and material evidence.

One point deserves particular attention here – the task of the historian is not merely to accept or reject a religious belief. The historian's task is to examine the available sources.

For this reason, wherever a subject admits of several views in this book, the principal views will be presented separately.

1.18 The Three Layers of Ayodhya's History

To understand the history of Ayodhya, it may be viewed in terms of three broad layers.

The first layer – religious and epic tradition. This includes the Ramayana, the Puranas, the Ram narrative, and religious memory.

The second layer – historical and literary sources. This includes Buddhist and Jain literature, ancient travel accounts, royal records, and other historical sources.

The third layer – material evidence. This includes archaeological excavation, architectural remains, coins, inscriptions, earthen vessels, and other material.

It is only by combining these three layers that a more balanced picture of Ayodhya's history can be prepared.

1.19 The Limits of Treating Tradition as Evidence

An important principle of this research treatise is that tradition will not be rejected, but it will be presented as what it is.

If a tradition is found in a religious text, it will be recorded as a literary or religious source. If the oral tradition of a family preserves some event, it will be recorded as oral history. If archaeology independently confirms that event, this will be noted as a separate piece of evidence.

And if no confirmation can be found for any claim, the book will state clearly that 'independent confirmation of this claim could not be found in the available sources.'

This approach does not weaken history; rather, it makes it more trustworthy.

1.20 Caution Regarding the Antiquity of Ayodhya

Indian religious tradition regards Ayodhya as extremely ancient. But before treating the phrase 'extremely ancient' as evidence for any particular year or century in modern historiography, the sources must be examined.

Similarly, it is not proper to directly equate the antiquity of the Ayodhya described in the Ramayana with the chronology of the present archaeological Ayodhya.

Archaeology can tell us in which period evidence of human activity or settlement is found at a particular site. Literature can tell us what memory of that place existed in a particular period or tradition.

By combining both kinds of evidence, a stronger historical interpretation can be constructed.

1.21 Ayodhya: Its Place in Indian Civilization

The greatest historical distinction of Ayodhya lies in its long cultural continuity.

This city – has been linked to the Ram narrative; linked to the memory of the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties; linked to the political history of Kosala; connected with Buddhist and Jain traditions; became a centre of Vaishnav devotion; became a land of saints and ascetics; became a principal centre of the pilgrimage tradition; and, in modern India, has become an extremely important site of religious and cultural discourse.

To view Ayodhya, therefore, merely as a religious city, or merely as an archaeological site, would be to limit its wider history.

1.22 History, Faith, and Evidence

The greatest challenge in writing about Ayodhya is precisely this – that here, both history and faith are extremely powerful.

Faith can preserve human cultural memory across generations. History studies the origin, development, and available evidence of that memory. Archaeology examines the material layers of that history.

Rather than viewing these three as being in conflict, the researcher must understand the relationships between them.

The purpose of this treatise is not to select material in order to prove any predetermined conclusion. The purpose is to place before the reader whatever evidence is available, together with its nature and its limits.

1.23 Key Findings of This Chapter

The study of this chapter yields the following points –

First, the Sanskrit etymology of the name 'Ayodhya' is generally understood in the sense of the invincible, or that which cannot be conquered.

Second, the religious identity of Ayodhya is particularly linked to Shri Ram and the tradition of the Ramayana.

Third, there is a strong literary tradition linking Ayodhya with the ancient region of Kosala.

Fourth, the tradition of the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties holds a central place in the cultural memory of Ayodhya, but independent examination is required before treating each genealogy as modern historical evidence.

Fifth, historians have differed over the relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya. It is therefore more appropriate to regard this question as an open subject of research.

Sixth, the Buddhist and Jain traditions are important additional sources for understanding the religious history of the Ayodhya region.

Seventh, the river Sarayu is an inseparable part of the geographical and religious history of Ayodhya.

Eighth, archaeology is an important means for studying the ancient habitation and material culture of Ayodhya, but in interpreting archaeological evidence, it is necessary to make clear its period and its nature.

Ninth, the history of Ayodhya is formed from many traditions and sources; no single category of source should therefore be made the sole basis of its entire history.

1.24 Conclusion

The history of Ayodhya resembles a river into which many streams converge. One stream is that of the Ramayana and the religious tradition of Shri Ram; a second is that of the memory of the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties; a third is that of the historical political geography of Kosala; a fourth is that of the Buddhist and Jain traditions; a fifth is that of archaeological and epigraphic

evidence; and, further on, that of Vaishnav devotion, the tradition of saints, and the modern institution of pilgrimage.

To identify each of these streams separately, and then to understand their mutual relationships, is the more scientific way of understanding the history of Ayodhya.

In this chapter, we have laid the foundation of the name, meaning, antiquity, and geographical background of Ayodhya. The question that follows is even more important – does Ayodhya find direct mention in Vedic literature? If it does, what is its nature? And if no clear mention of it is found in any Vedic text, how then is the standing of Ayodhya in the Ramayana and in the traditions that followed to be understood?

CHAPTER 2

Ayodhya in Vedic Literature

Part I: The Word 'Ayodhya' in the Vedas and Its Context

2.1 Preliminary Remarks

In discussing the antiquity of Ayodhya, the first question that arises is whether Ayodhya finds mention in the Vedas at all.

This question appears simple, but answering it demands the utmost care. To find the word 'Ayodhya' in some ancient text, and to assume that this word is a direct geographical reference to the present-day city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, are two entirely different matters.

Vedic literature is exceedingly vast, and its various Samhitas, Brahmana texts, Aranyakas, and Upanishads were composed and compiled across different historical periods. The Vedas contain material chiefly concerned with religious ritual, the gods, the cosmos, nature, social life, royal power, medicine, philosophical reflection, and many other aspects of human life. According to the Government of India's Vedic Heritage Portal, the Atharvaveda, alongside religious and philosophical matter, also contains material relating to social life, politics, agriculture, medicine, and other subjects.

The most important Vedic reference concerning Ayodhya is Atharvaveda 10.2.31. It is in this very hymn that the word 'Ayodhya' occurs.

But the interpretation of this hymn demands an extremely important caution in historiography.

2.2 The Word 'Ayodhya' in the Atharvaveda

In the thirty-first verse of the second hymn of the tenth book (Kanda) of the Atharvaveda occurs the celebrated line – "Aṣṭacakrā navadvārā devānām pūrayodhyā."

The remainder of the verse describes a 'city' (puri) said to have eight wheels and nine gates, within which is mentioned a golden vessel.

Here the word 'Ayodhya' carries the sense of 'unconquerable', or 'the invincible city'.

This reference is extremely important, for it establishes that the word 'Ayodhya' does exist within Vedic literature.

But it is precisely here that the next, and far more difficult, problem of research begins – is this word 'Ayodhya' in the Atharvaveda the name of that same historical city on the bank of the Sarayu which later came to be known as the birthplace of Ram?

It would not be proper to answer this question directly with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

2.3 The Literal Meaning of the Verse

The 'puri' described in Atharvaveda 10.2.31 is generally understood as follows: 'the invincible city of the gods, possessing eight wheels and nine gates.'

This is followed by a description relating to a golden vessel and a radiance situated within that city.

Here, the meaning of 'Ayodhya' need not be confined to the name of a particular place; it may equally express the general sense of an invincible city.

This is precisely why, in interpreting this verse, it would not be proper to declare it direct proof of the modern city of Ayodhya merely on the strength of the word alone.

2.4 The Distinctive Feature of 'Eight Wheels, Nine Gates'

The most important part of this verse is not the word 'Ayodhya' alone, but the structure described as 'aṣṭacakrā navadvārā' – eight wheels and nine gates.

The description of a city with 'eight wheels' and 'nine gates' presents an extraordinary symbolic structure.

In later Indian philosophical traditions, the human body itself has been explained as the 'city of nine gates' (navadvāra-puri). For this reason, a tradition developed of interpreting the 'puri' of this Atharvaveda verse philosophically, as a symbol of the human body or of consciousness.

It is therefore necessary to keep three levels distinct here – the first level, linguistic: the word 'Ayodhya' is present in the verse. The second level, philosophical: the city described with eight wheels and nine gates may be understood in a symbolic sense. The third level, historical-geographical: was this 'puri' the very city on the bank of the Sarayu? This question demands independent evidence.

It is this third question that is of the greatest importance for our research.

2.5 Does the Atharvaveda Reference Constitute Proof of the Present Ayodhya?

In answering this question, two distinct positions must be understood.

The first view – a traditional view may hold that the ancient occurrence of the word 'Ayodhya' in the Atharvaveda establishes the antiquity of the name Ayodhya, and that this word has continued within Indian religious tradition since very ancient times.

This view is significant because it makes clear that the name 'Ayodhya', or the concept of an 'invincible city', is ancient within Vedic literature.

The second view – a critical historical view asks whether the 'Ayodhya' used in this verse is a specific geographical city-name, or the description of a philosophical or metaphorical city.

According to this view, identifying the historical Ayodhya on the bank of the Sarayu on the strength of a single word alone cannot be regarded as sufficient evidence.

This book will not, therefore, conclude that – 'Atharvaveda 10.2.31 conclusively proves that the present city of Ayodhya existed at that time, under that very name.'

Rather, the more cautious conclusion will be – 'An ancient use of the word "Ayodhya" is found in the Atharvaveda; but the question of identifying the "Ayodhya" used in this verse with the historical city on the bank of the Sarayu requires separate and independent proof.'

This distinction is of the utmost importance from the standpoint of research.

2.6 The Nature of Vedic Literature

To understand the Vedic reference to Ayodhya, it is necessary first to understand the nature of Vedic literature itself.

The principal purpose of the Vedas was not, in the modern sense, to write the history of cities. They are vast collections of religious, philosophical, ritual, and social material.

The Atharvaveda in particular contains material relating to many practical aspects of life. According to the Government of India's Vedic Heritage Portal, the Atharvaveda contains material on the cure of disease, peace, protection, health, prosperity, and social life, as well as philosophical subjects such as Brahman and immortality beyond death.

For this reason, whenever the name of a city, or any place-related word, is found in Vedic literature, it is necessary to read its context in full.

2.7 The Historical Importance of the Atharvaveda

The Atharvaveda is an important Samhita of Vedic literature. According to the Government of India's Vedic Heritage Portal, two principal recensions of it survive today – the Shaunaka and the Paippalada. The Shaunaka Samhita comprises 20 Kandas and thousands of verses.

Oxford Bibliographies presents the Atharvaveda as the fourth Vedic collection and as an extremely important work of ancient Indian literature. Its subject matter is considerably different from, and broader than, that of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda.

The occurrence of the word 'Ayodhya' in the Atharvaveda is therefore significant for Indian linguistic and cultural history.

But in drawing historical conclusions, the context of the verse cannot be disregarded.

2.8 'Ayodhya': A City-Name or an Epithet?

In Sanskrit, the word 'Ayodhya' is not merely the name of a place; it also carries an adjectival meaning – that is, 'that which cannot be conquered in war'.

Whether its use in the Vedic verse is as the name of a specific city, or as an epithet for some 'invincible city', is a question of considerable importance from a linguistic standpoint.

If a word later becomes the settled name of a city, it does not follow that every ancient use of that word refers to that very geographical city.

For this reason, in this chapter we shall establish the antiquity of the word and the antiquity of the city as two separate matters.

2.9 The Vedic 'Ayodhya' and the Ayodhya of the Ramayana

An important chronological question arises here.

On the one hand, the word 'Ayodhya' occurs in the Atharvaveda. On the other, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya appears as a

specific city – the capital of Dasharatha and the birthplace of Shri Ram.

But to establish a direct historical connection between these two sources, we must first determine – first, what did 'Ayodhya' mean in the relevant Atharvaveda verse? Second, was 'Ayodhya' at that time the name of a geographical city at all? Third, with which historical geography can the Ayodhya of the Ramayana be identified? Fourth, how much linguistic and cultural continuity exists between the two traditions?

The answers to these questions will be sought, in turn, in the chapters that follow.

2.10 The Concept of Cities in Vedic Literature

In studying Vedic literature, we must also examine what kinds of words were used for towns, cities, villages, forts, and dwelling-places.

The development of Vedic society was not confined to rural life alone. Political organization, communities, sovereign power, assemblies, councils, and various kinds of settlements are all mentioned in Vedic literature.

However, it would not be proper to understand every such mention in the modern sense of a 'city'.

Similarly, from the mere occurrence of the word 'puri', it cannot immediately be concluded that it denoted a developed city in the modern sense.

A study of terminology in relation to Ayodhya is therefore essential.

2.11 The Word 'Puri' and Ayodhya

In the Atharvaveda verse, the concept of a 'puri' occurs together with 'Ayodhya'.

The general meaning of 'puri' may be taken as a city, a dwelling, or a protected place. But the verse's description of it as having eight wheels and nine gates carries it beyond an ordinary geographical city, toward a symbolic structure as well.

This is why treating this verse merely as a description of a city demands caution.

If read in a symbolic sense, 'Ayodhya' may be a metaphor for the human body, or for some divine structure. If read in a geographical sense, the image of some invincible city emerges.

Both interpretations must be recorded in this research.

2.12 The Limits of Vedic Evidence

To acknowledge the limits of evidence in historiography is not a weakness, but the honesty of research.

If we possess a Vedic verse in which the word 'Ayodhya' occurs, we can certainly state that this word is present in Vedic literature.

But to go further and state that – 'the present city of Ayodhya bore this very name at the time of the Atharvaveda, and this very city is described in this verse' – requires additional evidence.

Among such evidence, archaeological strata, the continuity of the ancient site, independent literary sources, epigraphic material, and other geographical indicators would be important.

2.13 The First Important Conclusion from a Research Standpoint

On the basis of this Part, our strongest conclusion at this stage is: 'An ancient use of the word "Ayodhya" is found in Atharvaveda 10.2.31. But to connect the "Ayodhya" described in this verse conclusively with the historical city of Ayodhya on the bank of the Sarayu, additional independent evidence is required.'

This conclusion neither diminishes the Vedic reference, nor rejects the antiquity of the present-day Ayodhya.

Rather, it opens the way for further research by keeping the two questions separate.

2.14 The Direction of Further Research

The next question is whether the Samhitas of the Rigveda, Samaveda, and Yajurveda contain any clear geographical indication of Ayodhya or of anything related to it.

If any direct mention is found, its text, recension, verse number, and context will need to be examined.

If no direct mention is found, that absence, too, will be honestly recorded.

Thereafter, the Brahmana texts, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads will be examined for indications relating to Ayodhya or Kosala.

In this way, our study will not rest upon a single celebrated verse alone, but will attempt to trace the standing of Ayodhya across the whole of Vedic literature.

2.15 Conclusion of Part I

The study of the relationship between Vedic literature and Ayodhya teaches us an extremely important lesson – that evidence of antiquity must be separated into distinct levels.

The occurrence of the word 'Ayodhya' in Vedic literature is an important linguistic and cultural piece of evidence.

But to establish the historical identity of a specific city, a name alone is not sufficient.

In this research treatise, therefore, we shall keep three matters distinct – the antiquity of the word; the antiquity of the city; and the religious-cultural continuity of the city.

It is only when evidence for each of these three emerges from separate sources that a stronger picture of the ancient history of Ayodhya will be formed.

In the Part that follows, we shall search for Ayodhya, Kosala, the Sarayu, and related geographical indications in the other texts of Vedic literature, and examine whether independent grounds exist for connecting the Atharvaveda's reference to 'Ayodhya' with any other Vedic source.

Research Verification Note (For the Author)

The principal scholarly references cited in this chapter have been verified against external sources:

1. Hans T. Bakker's work, Ayodhyā: Part I — The History of Ayodhyā from the 7th Century BC to the middle of the 18th century, its development into a sacred centre... (Groningen Oriental Studies, Vol. 1, Egbert Forsten, 1986) — this reference has been correctly verified. The title and content of the work fully match the description given in the chapter.

2. W. Vost's article 'Sāketa, Shâ-chi, or Pi-so-kia', published in 1905 in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS) (p. 437), has been verified. The article does record the long-standing dispute over the location of Saketa, as stated in the chapter.

3. The fact that Alexander Cunningham identified Saketa with Ayodhya has been verified (in his survey of 1862-63, connecting it also with Faxian's 'Sha-chi' and Xuanzang's 'Visakha').

4. B. H. Baden-Powell's 1899 article 'Notes on the origin of the "Lunar" and "Solar" Aryan tribes and on the "Rajput" clans' (JRAS, pp. 295-328, 519-563) has been verified, in which the Solar-dynasty tradition is discussed.

5. The derivation of the word 'Ayodhya' from the root 'yudh' – in the sense of the invincible, or that which cannot be conquered – accords with standard Sanskrit etymology and is correct.

6. The original text of Atharvaveda 10.2.31 ('Aṣṭacakrā navadvārā devānāṃ pūrayodhyā, tasyāṃ hiraṇyayaḥ kośaḥ svargo jyotiṣāvṛtaḥ') has been quoted accurately – verified (in agreement with Whitney's translation and other sources).

7. This verse forms part of Sukta 10.2 (the 'Brahma-prakashana Sukta'), which raises philosophical questions concerning the human body and consciousness – this verifies the chapter's caution that this verse should not be treated merely as geographical proof of a city.

8. The structure of the Atharvaveda (20 Kandas, approximately 5,987/6,000 verses, 730 Suktas, the Shaunaka and Paippalada recensions) has been verified against the Government of India's Vedic Heritage Portal (vedicheritage.gov.in) and other sources.

On this basis, no factual error has been found in Chapter 1 or in Chapter 2 (Part I); all principal citations and historical references correspond with verified sources. Matters of scholarly disagreement (such as the identification of Saketa with Ayodhya, and the interpretation of the word 'Ayodhya' in the Atharvaveda) have properly been presented as open questions, which is sound from an academic standpoint.

CHAPTER 3

Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana

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Part 1: The Historical-Literary Background of the Valmiki Ramayana and Ayodhya

The Valmiki Ramayana stands among the great works of Indian literature that established, in an exceptionally wide-reaching way, the life, personality, and ideals of Lord Shri Ram, together with the cultural memory of Ayodhya, within Indian civilization. To understand Ayodhya, the study of the Ramayana is important not only from a religious standpoint, but equally from literary, cultural, social, and historical perspectives.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya appears not merely as a city, but is portrayed as the centre of royal authority, dharma, family, social order, and public propriety (loka-maryada). For this reason, the description of Ayodhya acquires particular importance from the very opening episodes of the Ramayana.

The opening cantos of the Bala Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana provide a detailed introduction to Ayodhya and the kingdom of Kosala. Ayodhya, the capital of Maharaja Dasharatha, is presented as a prosperous, well-ordered, and distinguished city. The text

mentions the city's highways, buildings, gardens, water sources, commercial activity, and residents of various classes. This suggests that, within the narrative tradition of the Ramayana, Ayodhya was envisioned as a developed urban centre.

Ayodhya and Kosala

In the Ramayana, Ayodhya is described as the capital of the kingdom of Kosala. It is from this capital that Maharaja Dasharatha governs his realm. His administration is described as including a council of ministers, priests, a commander of the army, and other officials.

An important research caution is required here. It was not the purpose of the Valmiki Ramayana to present, in the modern sense, an administrative survey of any kingdom. The administrative details found in it should not, therefore, be treated as equivalent to a modern system of governance. Even so, these details remain an important literary source for understanding ancient Indian kingship and social ideals.

The Meaning of the Name Ayodhya

The word 'Ayodhya' is generally held to derive from the Sanskrit root 'yudh'. In its common etymological sense, it denotes a city that cannot be conquered by war, or one that is difficult to war against.

The description of Ayodhya in the Ramayana appears consistent with this standing. It is presented not merely as the king's capital, but as a secure, prosperous, and well-ordered city.

In understanding this literary portrayal of Ayodhya, it should also be kept in mind that the etymology of a city's name and its actual historical development cannot be treated as one and the same matter. The religious and literary interpretation of the name has its own importance, while archaeological and epigraphic evidence provides a different kind of testimony concerning the city's material history.

The Ayodhya of Maharaja Dasharatha

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Maharaja Dasharatha is the king of Ayodhya. In describing his reign, the text mentions the prosperity of the city, the condition of its subjects, and the royal administration.

Through the character of Dasharatha, the Ramayana gives prominence to ideals such as dharma, truthfulness, the keeping of one's word, and responsibility toward one's subjects. These same ideals appear still more clearly, later, in the life of Shri Ram.

The distinctiveness of Ayodhya lies not merely in its material splendour, but in the moral order at its centre — the relationship of duty between king and subject.

The Description of the City of Ayodhya

In the Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, the portrayal of the city becomes still more vivid. Numerous episodes connected with the royal palace, the highways, buildings, marketplaces, gardens, and civic life give the narrative a broad social background.

An important aspect of the Ramayana's description of Ayodhya is that the city is not viewed solely from the perspective of the royal family. The feelings of ordinary citizens also become part of the narrative. When Shri Ram leaves Ayodhya for the forest, the reaction of the city's residents shows that Ram's bond was not with the throne alone, but with the people as well.

It is for this reason that the Ayodhya of the Ramayana came to be established, in Indian cultural memory, as 'the city of Ram'.

The Importance of the Ramayana from a Research Standpoint

In the study of Ayodhya's history, the Valmiki Ramayana occupies an extremely important place, but its use also carries a scientific limit. The Ramayana is an epic, in which religious, moral, poetic, and cultural elements are interwoven.

It would not, therefore, be proper to treat every detail derived from this text directly as archaeological fact. For example, the poetic description of a building, a road, or an administrative arrangement

informs us of the tradition within which Ayodhya was imagined, but the historical confirmation of such a description would require archaeological excavation, inscriptions, coins, and other independent sources.

This research treatise will follow precisely this principle – literary evidence will be presented as literary evidence, religious tradition as religious tradition, and archaeological evidence as archaeological evidence.

In the Part that follows, we shall undertake a systematic study of the Valmiki Ramayana's detailed description of the city of Ayodhya, its highways, buildings, gardens, marketplaces, civic life, and the royal court of Dasharatha.

Part 2: The Urban Layout, Royal Palace, and Social Life of Ayodhya

The description of Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana is extremely rich and evocative. This description does not merely present a picture of a capital's physical beauty; it also offers a glimpse of the imagined or remembered social order, royal prestige, religious life, and civic culture of that time.

In the opening cantos of the Bala Kanda, Ayodhya is presented as the capital of the kingdom of Kosala. The city is connected with the reign of Maharaja Dasharatha, and is portrayed as a capital in which, alongside royal authority, dharma, learning, trade, and social life are all active.

1. Ayodhya as a Well-Ordered Capital

The kinds of epithets and comparisons used for Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana convey the prosperity and prestige of the city. The text describes wide roads, vast buildings, royal precincts, gardens, and various kinds of public spaces.

In the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya appears as a capital in which ordinary civic life proceeds alongside royal activity. The order of the city is a symbol of the king's prestige and the power of the state.

It must be made clear here that the description of the city found in the Ramayana cannot be read as equivalent to a modern archaeological map. It is a literary description, in which particular importance is given to the city's grandeur and ideal form.

2. Highways and the City's Thoroughfares

The description of Ayodhya makes particular mention of highways and roads. This suggests that the planning of the city gave importance to major routes of movement.

Highways were not merely a means of travel. They were also, in all likelihood, centres of royal processions, religious activity, civic movement, and public life – although not all of these particulars can be established directly as historical fact from every episode of the Ramayana.

The crowds of Ayodhya's citizens, and their emotional response, at the time of Shri Ram's departure for the forest, make clear that the public life of the city plays an important role in the narrative.

3. Buildings and the Royal Palace

The buildings and palaces of the royal family in Ayodhya are described in various episodes of the Ramayana. Maharaja Dasharatha's palace is not merely the seat of power; it is also the principal site of family and royal decisions.

Kaikeyi's chambers, Dasharatha's residence, and other royal precincts become important settings of the narrative. In particular, the episode of Kaikeyi's demand for her two boons, and the consequent exile of Shri Ram, occurs within this very royal household.

The royal palace of Ayodhya is, therefore, not merely a matter of architecture in the Ramayana. It also becomes the centre of the narrative's moral and political conflict.

4. The Markets and Economic Life of Ayodhya

In connection with the prosperity of Ayodhya, the Ramayana indicates various kinds of economic activity. It mentions the presence in the city of merchants, artisans, and people engaged in diverse occupations.

This description helps us understand that the Ayodhya of the Ramayana was not regarded merely as a city of the royal family and soldiers, but as one inhabited by diverse social and economic classes.

Here too, however, caution is required from a research standpoint. The economic life mentioned in the Ramayana cannot be taken as a complete description of the economy of any particular historical century. This would require comparison with

contemporary archaeological material, coins, inscriptions, and other literary sources.

5. The Religious Atmosphere of Ayodhya

In the Valmiki Ramayana, the relationship between dharma and royal authority appears extremely close. In Maharaja Dasharatha's court, sages and priests are held in honour. Sages such as Vashishtha appear as the religious and moral guides of the royal family.

Yajnas, religious rites, charity, and the honouring of Brahmins are mentioned repeatedly in the narrative of the Ramayana. This reveals an important aspect of Ayodhya's cultural identity.

The performance by Dasharatha of the Putrakameshti Yajna, and the involvement of Rishyashringa in it, is an important example of this very religious environment.

6. The Relationship between the Citizens and the Royal Family

The Ramayana gives particular importance to the relationship between the citizens of Ayodhya and the king. This relationship appears most clearly in the character of Shri Ram.

When the announcement of Shri Ram's coronation is made, an atmosphere of enthusiasm fills the city. Conversely, when news of his exile spreads, that same city is plunged into grief.

This change reveals, in the Ramayana, both Shri Ram's popularity and his emotional bond with the citizens.

7. The Impact of Shri Ram's Departure for the Forest

Among the most poignant episodes in the historical memory of Ayodhya is Shri Ram's departure for the forest.

In place of preparations for his coronation comes the announcement of exile. Shri Ram accepts the renunciation of the kingdom, royal comforts, and royal rights, in order to uphold his father's word.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, this decision of Shri Ram is linked to the ideals of filial obedience, truth, and adherence to dharma.

When Shri Ram departs from Ayodhya, the citizens follow after him. This episode raises Ayodhya above a mere geographical location, making it an emotional and cultural centre.

8. Ayodhya: The Literary Form of an Ideal Capital

In portraying Ayodhya, the Valmiki Ramayana consistently displays three principal elements – royal authority, dharma, and public life.

Through King Dasharatha, the duty of kingship (rajadharma) comes to the fore. Through the sages and religious rites, dharma and spiritual life are revealed. And through the response of the citizens, public life and social sentiment come to the fore.

It is precisely this synthesis that gives the Ayodhya of the Ramayana its distinctive image, in Indian literature, of an ideal capital.

Research Findings

In studying the Ayodhya described in the Valmiki Ramayana, we should keep three levels distinct –

1. The literary level – the poetic and narrative description of Ayodhya in the Ramayana.

2. The religious-cultural level – the faith and traditions associated with Shri Ram, Dasharatha, Vashishtha, and the Ram narrative.

3. The historical-archaeological level – the inscriptions, archaeological remains, and other sources that independently confirm the material past of Ayodhya.

It would not be proper to regard these three as substitutes for one another. Rather, their comparative study helps us understand the history of Ayodhya in a more balanced and scientific manner.

In Part 3, we shall undertake a systematic study, on the basis of the Valmiki Ramayana, of Dasharatha's reign, the royal family, the birth of Shri Ram, his childhood, and the religious and social life of Ayodhya.

Part 3: Maharaja Dasharatha, the Royal Family, and the Birth of Shri Ram

In the Valmiki Ramayana, the history of Ayodhya is deeply bound up with the episodes concerning Maharaja Dasharatha and his royal family. In the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya is not merely the backdrop of events; it is itself present as a principal cultural centre of the narrative. Dasharatha's reign, the circumstances of his family, the birth of Shri Ram, and, later, his departure for the forest – all of these events are connected with Ayodhya.

1. Maharaja Dasharatha and the Capital of Kosala

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Maharaja Dasharatha was the king of Kosala, and Ayodhya was his capital. His reign is presented as a prosperous and well-ordered kingdom.

In Dasharatha's character, on the one hand appears the figure of a powerful king; on the other, he emerges as a father who loves his sons deeply. In the Ramayana, the greatest crisis of his life comes when Kaikeyi, invoking her two boons, demands fourteen years of exile for Shri Ram and the kingdom for Bharat.

This episode presents, in an extremely poignant form, the conflict between the duty of kingship and family sentiment.

2. Dasharatha's Royal Court

The Ramayana also mentions Dasharatha's royal court. The presence, alongside the king, of ministers, priests, and learned persons appears as part of the process of royal decision-making.

The position of the great sage Vashishtha is of particular importance. He appears as the priest and spiritual guide of the royal family.

This reveals an important picture of the mutual relationship between dharma and governance in the political order of the Ramayana.

However, it would not be proper to apply the concepts of modern administrative institutions directly to the royal court of the Ramayana. The details available here should be understood within the text's own social and political background.

3. The Putrakameshti Yajna and the Birth of Shri Ram

In the Bala Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, an important concern of Dasharatha comes to the fore – he had no children. Desiring a son, he decides to have a yajna performed.

The yajna is performed in the presence of Rishyashringa. Thereafter, Dasharatha distributes the divine payasam given by the Yajna-purusha among his queens.

According to the narrative of the Ramayana, this results in the birth of Shri Ram from Kausalya, Bharat from Kaikeyi, and Lakshman and Shatrughna from Sumitra.

This episode is of great importance within the religious tradition of the Ram narrative. The birth of Shri Ram is connected not only with the ordinary succession of a royal dynasty, but also with the tradition of divine incarnation.

From a research standpoint, it is necessary here to maintain the distinction between literary narrative and historical evidence. This account concerning the birth of Shri Ram is part of the religious-literary tradition of the Valmiki Ramayana.

4. The Childhood of the Four Princes

The Ramayana describes the childhood of the four princes — Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughna.

Shri Ram, as the eldest son, holds particular importance. Lakshman's deep attachment to Ram, and Shatrughna's close bond with Bharat, appear repeatedly in the narrative.

All four princes are given education, training in arms, and the knowledge necessary for princes.

Thus, in the Ramayana, the life of the princes is not merely one of luxurious royal living. Education, discipline, service to one's

teacher, and the art of warfare all occupy an important place within it.

5. The Character of Shri Ram

In the Valmiki Ramayana, the personality of Shri Ram is built of many virtues. He is presented as a prince who is truthful, devoted to dharma, humble, valiant, solicitous of his subjects' welfare, and bound by propriety.

The most important aspect of Shri Ram's character in the Ramayana is that he places dharma and duty above personal happiness.

This is why, when he receives news of his exile, he does not contend for the throne. Regarding his father's word as supreme, he accepts the decision to go to the forest.

6. The Bond between Ayodhya and Shri Ram

The relationship between Shri Ram and Ayodhya is not merely that of a birthplace. In the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya is connected with every important phase of his life.

Here he is born; here his childhood passes; here his life after marriage begins; and it is from here that he departs for the forest.

Later, on his return from exile, Shri Ram's coronation takes place in Ayodhya. Thus, in the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya

becomes both the starting point and the final political axis of Shri Ram's life.

7. The Social Life of Ayodhya

The Valmiki Ramayana mentions many classes among the residents of Ayodhya. Alongside the king and the royal family, Brahmins, merchants, artisans, soldiers, and ordinary citizens are also part of the city's social life.

In describing ideal civic life, the Ramayana gives importance to dharma, truth, righteous conduct, and social duty.

It should be kept in mind that this account does not give us a modern, census-based picture of the social life of that era. It is chiefly a literary portrayal of the ideal social order presented in the epic.

8. Religious Life in Ayodhya

In the religious life of Ayodhya, yajnas, the honouring of sages, the role of priests, and Vedic traditions occupy a special place.

The yajna organized by Dasharatha, and the role of sages such as Vashishtha, show that a deep connection between royal authority and religious tradition is presented in the Ayodhya of the Ramayana.

This very religious atmosphere later becomes the foundation of the cultural identity of the Ram narrative.

9. An Important Caution from a Research Standpoint

In studying the ancient history of Ayodhya, the Valmiki Ramayana should be regarded as an extremely important literary source, but it would not be proper to fix the modern historical date or archaeological proof of any event on the basis of this text alone.

In the chapters that follow in this research treatise, the accounts of the Ramayana will be compared with the Puranas, Buddhist and Jain literature, epigraphic evidence, archaeological evidence, and foreign travel accounts.

Through this comparative method, an attempt will be made to understand how the memory of Ayodhya developed across various Indian traditions.

Conclusion

The Ayodhya of the Valmiki Ramayana appears as a capital in which royal authority, dharma, family, education, social life, and public sentiment are interconnected.

From the reign of Maharaja Dasharatha to the birth of Shri Ram and his departure for the forest, Ayodhya remains the central land of the Ram narrative. Through the character of Shri Ram,

Ayodhya ceases to be merely a royal city, and becomes a cultural symbol-land of dharma, truth, duty, and propriety.

In Part 4 that follows, we shall undertake a systematic study, based on the Valmiki Ramayana, of the preparations for Shri Ram's coronation, Kaikeyi's boons, the exile, the reaction of the people of Ayodhya, and Shri Ram's departure from Ayodhya.

Part 4: From Coronation to Exile – The Decisive Episode of Ayodhya

In the Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, the portrayal of Ayodhya reaches its most poignant and powerful form. The very city in which preparations were underway for Shri Ram's coronation is plunged, only a short time later, into grief and sorrow. This transformation is not merely an event within the royal family; it affects the social and emotional life of the whole of Ayodhya.

1. Preparations for Shri Ram's Coronation

Maharaja Dasharatha had grown old. He decided to install Shri Ram as heir apparent (yuvaraja). According to the Ramayana, the citizens of Ayodhya, too, were pleased at his coronation, on account of Shri Ram's virtues and his popularity among the people.

With the preparations for the coronation, an atmosphere of festivity appears in Ayodhya. The city is decorated, and enthusiasm spreads among its citizens.

This episode shows how much importance the narrative of the Ramayana gives to the relationship between king and subjects. Shri Ram's coronation is presented not merely as a decision of the royal family, but as an occasion of joy for Ayodhya.

2. Kaikeyi's Boons

In the midst of the preparations for the coronation, the narrative suddenly turns. Kaikeyi recalls the two boons granted to her in the past. She demands of Dasharatha that these boons be fulfilled.

The first boon – the kingdom for Bharat. The second boon – fourteen years of exile for Shri Ram.

Dasharatha is thrown into deep sorrow by this demand. He does not wish to send Shri Ram to the forest, but he is bound by his own word.

This episode is the central point of the Ramayana's moral reflection. King Dasharatha faces, on the one hand, love for his son, and on the other, the sanctity of a word once given.

3. Shri Ram's Decision

When Shri Ram receives news of his exile, he does not treat it as an occasion for opposition or rebellion. Regarding his father's word as supreme, he prepares to go to the forest.

Here the Valmiki Ramayana brings forward that aspect of Shri Ram's character which later Indian tradition came to regard as the ideal of propriety and adherence to dharma.

For Shri Ram, his father's truth and word matter more than the kingdom itself.

4. The Company of Sita and Lakshman

On hearing of Shri Ram's decision to go to the forest, Sita resolves to accompany him. Lakshman, too, insists on going with his brother.

Thus, the departure for the forest ceases to be Shri Ram's personal journey alone. It becomes the joint journey of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman.

For Ayodhya, this event is extremely emotional, for three principal members of the royal family are leaving the city.

5. The Reaction of the People of Ayodhya

The Valmiki Ramayana gives an extremely poignant account of the reaction of the citizens of Ayodhya.

Out of love for Shri Ram, the citizens set out after him. They do not wish Shri Ram to leave them.

This episode carries particular significance, for it reveals the bond established, in the Ramayana, between Shri Ram and the people.

The relationship here between prince and citizen is not merely one of governance. It becomes a relationship of trust, affection, and moral leadership.

6. The Grief of Ayodhya

After Shri Ram's departure, the atmosphere of Ayodhya changes. The city that had been preparing for celebration is now overtaken by grief.

Dasharatha is thrown into deep anguish by separation from his son. According to the Ramayana, this separation from Ram becomes the greatest sorrow of his life.

In this episode, Ayodhya itself appears almost as an emotional character – festive when Ram is present, grieving when he departs.

7. The Chariot and the Departure from Ayodhya

Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman set out from Ayodhya in a chariot. The charioteer Sumantra accompanies them on this journey.

The citizens follow after them in large numbers. Shri Ram counsels them to return and, going back to Ayodhya, to attend to their duties.

Here Shri Ram's character is once again revealed. He himself accepts the difficult circumstance, but does not wish to draw the citizens away from their ordinary lives and duties.

8. Towards the River Tamasa

After leaving Ayodhya, Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman proceed onward and arrive near the river Tamasa.

In the narrative of the Ramayana, this episode marks an important stage of transition between Ayodhya and the forest. On one side lies Ayodhya, now behind them; on the other, ahead, lies the life of exile.

The plan to send the citizens back is also revealed at this very stage.

9. From Royal Authority Toward Asceticism

The departure for the forest did not merely mean going away from the capital. It marked, in the life of Shri Ram, a transition from the life of a prince to that of a forest-dweller and an ascetic.

In Ayodhya, he had had the royal palace, royal comforts, and the right to rule. In the forest, he had to face a hard life, the hermitages of sages, and natural hardship.

The Ramayana presents this transformation as a test of Shri Ram's character.

10. The Moral Message of the Ayodhya Kanda

This entire episode of the Ayodhya Kanda raises a number of moral questions – can a king go back on his word? Can a son renounce his own right in order to uphold his father's word? Can

dharma and truth be placed above royal power? Is the relationship of the subjects to their king merely a political one?

The Valmiki Ramayana presents its answer to these questions through the conduct of Shri Ram.

Assessment from a Research Standpoint

In undertaking a historical study of this episode, we should view it at two levels.

The first level – the narrative of the Ramayana and religious tradition. At this level, Shri Ram's exile, Kaikeyi's boons, and Dasharatha's word are central episodes of the Ram narrative.

The second level – historical research. At this level, independent sources would be required for the date, physical route, and archaeological confirmation of these events.

In this research treatise, therefore, the account of the Valmiki Ramayana will be presented within its own original literary context, while, in later chapters, other evidence will be studied comparatively in order to confirm its historical aspect.

Conclusion

The narrative from Shri Ram's coronation to his departure for the forest is an extremely important part of the cultural history of

Ayodhya. This episode shows that, in the Ramayana, Ayodhya is not merely a city of palaces and royal power.

It is also the land of the relationship between king and subjects, of family and duty, of truth and one's given word, and of the conflict between dharma and personal desire.

With Shri Ram's departure from Ayodhya for the forest, the narrative expands geographically, but the importance of Ayodhya does not diminish. On the contrary, throughout the whole period of his exile, Ayodhya remains the centre of the memory of Shri Ram and of the anticipation of his return.

In Part 5, we shall study Bharat's return to Ayodhya, the death of Dasharatha, Bharat's attempt to bring Shri Ram back, the episode at Chitrakuta, and the political and cultural effects of Shri Ram's absence from Ayodhya.

Part 5: Bharat's Arrival in Ayodhya, the Death of Dasharatha, and the Tradition of Ram's Sandals

After the departure of Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman for the forest, the condition of Ayodhya becomes extremely sorrowful. In the very city where preparations for the coronation had recently been under way, an atmosphere of grief now prevails. The Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana provides a detailed and poignant portrayal of this transformation.

1. Bharat's Absence

At the time Shri Ram's departure for the forest took place, Bharat was not present in Ayodhya. He had gone to his maternal grandfather's house. He learns of the events that occurred in Ayodhya only later.

When Bharat returns and learns that Shri Ram has been given fourteen years of exile, and that his father Dasharatha is in an extremely grave condition, he is thrown into deep grief.

Bharat's character becomes important here, for he could have accepted the benefit of the decision that led to Shri Ram's exile — but he does not accept it.

2. Bharat and Kaikeyi

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Bharat expresses deep sorrow before his mother Kaikeyi over the episode of Shri Ram's exile.

He himself has no desire to obtain the kingdom. For him, Shri Ram alone is the rightful king of Ayodhya.

This episode brings forward an important ideal in Bharat's character – brotherly love, and detachment from the kingdom.

Bharat's conduct also shows that, in the Ramayana, royal authority is connected with dharma and duty, rather than with personal entitlement.

3. The Death of Maharaja Dasharatha

In separation from Shri Ram, Maharaja Dasharatha's condition deteriorates severely. He remembers Ram again and again, and eventually passes away.

Dasharatha's death is a decisive turning point in the narrative of the Ramayana.

On the one hand, the father has passed away; on the other, the eldest son, Shri Ram, is in the forest, and the throne of Ayodhya stands vacant.

In this way, Ayodhya passes through both a political and an emotional crisis.

4. Bharat and the Throne

Bharat has the opportunity to assume the kingdom. But he does not regard it as his right.

Bharat's position here is of great importance in the Valmiki Ramayana. He clearly regards Shri Ram alone as the rightful king of Ayodhya.

This reveals an important concept of rajadharma in the Ramayana – that the kingdom should be governed not by personal desire, but by dharma and the propriety of rightful succession.

5. The Decision to Bring Shri Ram Back

Bharat decides that he will go to the forest and bring Shri Ram back to Ayodhya.

Taking with him ministers, elders, and many people of Ayodhya, he sets out in search of Shri Ram.

This journey is not merely a journey to bring back a brother. It is also a symbol of Ayodhya's own longing to have its beloved prince return.

6. Ayodhya's Delegation Toward the Forest

Bharat's journey toward the forest is an extremely important episode in the Ramayana.

Members of the royal family, his teacher, and others accompany him. This shows that Shri Ram's exile had ceased to be merely a private family matter. Its effect had been felt across the whole kingdom and the royal household.

Bharat's purpose was clear – to bring Shri Ram back and entrust him with the governance of Ayodhya.

7. The Meeting of Shri Ram and Bharat at Chitrakuta

Bharat eventually reaches Chitrakuta and meets Shri Ram.

This meeting of the two brothers is among the most emotionally charged episodes of the Ramayana.

Bharat urges Shri Ram to return to Ayodhya. He explains that he himself does not wish to accept the kingdom.

Shri Ram, for his part, regarding his father's word as dharma, remains firm in his decision to complete his exile.

Two commitments to dharma appear here – Bharat's insistence: the rightful king should be restored to his kingdom. Ram's decision: the word given by his father must be fulfilled.

Through this exchange, the Ramayana presents, in great depth, the complexity of dharma.

8. Shri Ram's Sandals

When Shri Ram is not willing to return to Ayodhya, Bharat returns to Ayodhya carrying his sandals.

In the later tradition of devotion to Ram, this episode became extremely important. Shri Ram's sandals came to be venerated as his representative.

Rather than establishing himself as king, Bharat resolves to govern as Shri Ram's representative.

This episode is regarded, in Indian cultural tradition, as a singular example of renunciation, brotherly devotion, and detachment from power.

9. Nandigram and Bharat's Way of Life

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Bharat does not live a life of luxury amid the royal comforts of Ayodhya. Awaiting Shri Ram's return, he adopts a life resembling that of an ascetic.

This episode reveals a distinctive concept of royal authority in the Ramayana – that even in the absence of the king, power should not become a means of personal enjoyment.

It is for this reason that Bharat's character holds a special place among the moral ideals of the Ramayana.

10. Shri Ram's Absence from Ayodhya

During Shri Ram's exile, the political life of Ayodhya continues, but the emotional condition of the city, in the Ramayana, remains continuously bound up with Shri Ram.

Shri Ram's absence from Ayodhya is not merely the absence of a prince. It is the absence of the ideal ruler whom the citizens regarded as their beloved.

From this point onward, the bond between Shri Ram and the city grows still deeper within the cultural memory of Ayodhya.

11. The Historical-Cultural Importance of Bharat's Character

Bharat's character became, in Indian literature, an important example of the renunciation of power.

He did not accept the kingdom as his right; instead, he established the tradition of governing with Shri Ram's sandals as a symbol.

This episode remained extremely influential in later Ram narratives, devotional literature, and folk tradition.

From a research standpoint, however, it must be kept in mind that not every detail developed in later folk traditions can be treated directly as the original text of the Valmiki Ramayana. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish the original Valmiki Ramayana from the later traditions of the Ram narrative.

12. Ayodhya and the Concept of Ram Rajya

The episodes of Shri Ram's departure for the forest and Bharat's renunciation, taken together, prepare the background for the cultural concept of Ram Rajya.

Ram Rajya ceases to be merely the name of a political power. In Indian tradition, it becomes a symbol of justice, dharma, public welfare, truth, and ideal governance.

The roots of this ideal are visible in the narrative of the Ramayana, but its fuller political and social meanings developed across different periods.

Conclusion

In the Valmiki Ramayana, the history of Ayodhya enters a new phase after Shri Ram's departure for the forest. The death of Dasharatha, Bharat's grief, the attempt to bring Shri Ram back, and, finally, the acceptance of the sandals – all these episodes give depth to the political and cultural character of Ayodhya.

Throughout this entire narrative, both Ram and Bharat place dharma above power.

On the one hand, Shri Ram renounces the kingdom for the sake of his father's word; on the other, Bharat, even after obtaining the kingdom, does not accept it as his own right. It is these two characters, together, that play an important role in establishing Ayodhya, in Indian cultural memory, not merely as an ancient

capital, but as a city symbolizing dharma, propriety, and ideal governance.

In Part 6, which follows, we shall study the condition of Ayodhya after Shri Ram's period of exile, the fourteen years of waiting, Shri Ram's return, his coronation in Ayodhya, and the concept of Ram Rajya.

Part 6: Shri Ram's Return to Ayodhya, Coronation, and Ram Rajya

After Shri Ram's departure for the forest, the life of Ayodhya becomes bound up with fourteen years of waiting. In the Valmiki Ramayana, most of the events of the years of exile occur away from Ayodhya, but the presence of Ayodhya persists throughout the narrative. Bharat's waiting for Shri Ram's return, the honouring of the sandals, and, finally, Shri Ram's return, deepen this bond still further.

1. The Fourteen Years of Waiting

After Shri Ram's departure for the forest, Bharat takes charge of the governance of Ayodhya as Shri Ram's representative. He does not establish himself as king, but awaits Shri Ram's return.

In the Ramayana, this period is not merely a political waiting. It is the waiting for that ideal ruler whom Ayodhya had accepted in its heart.

Bharat's restraint gives this narrative special moral significance.

2. The Completion of the Period of Exile

Shri Ram's exile was fixed at fourteen years. In its final phase, his war with Ravana, the king of Lanka, takes place, and Sita is freed.

In the Yuddha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, following the victory at Lanka, the account describes the preparations for Shri Ram's return to Ayodhya.

Here the narrative once again centres upon Ayodhya.

3. The Journey Back to Ayodhya

After the victory at Lanka, Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman set out for Ayodhya. This journey involves the episode of the Pushpaka Vimana.

Along the way, mentioning various places, Shri Ram tells Sita about his journey and the sites connected with it.

This journey toward Ayodhya becomes, in the narrative of the Ramayana, a symbol of the renewed transition between the life of exile and royal life.

4. The News Reaches Bharat

News of Shri Ram's return reaches Bharat. The moment for which he had waited so long now draws near.

Bharat's joy, and the delight of Ayodhya, make this stage of the Ramayana extremely important.

The very city from which Shri Ram had departed for the forest fourteen years earlier now prepares to welcome him.

5. Shri Ram's Welcome in Ayodhya

On the occasion of Shri Ram's return, an atmosphere of celebration fills Ayodhya.

The Ramayana describes the decoration of the city, the enthusiasm of its citizens, and the royal welcome.

This scene stands in contrast to the time when Shri Ram had departed for the forest. Then, Ayodhya was in mourning; now, that same Ayodhya overflows with joy.

Thus, two forms of Ayodhya appear in the Ramayana – the Ayodhya of Ram's departure (an Ayodhya of grief), and the Ayodhya of Ram's return (an Ayodhya of celebration).

6. The Reunion of Shri Ram and Bharat

The reunion of Shri Ram and Bharat is among the most emotionally moving episodes of the narrative.

Bharat restores the kingdom to Shri Ram. The sandals which he had honoured, for so many years, as Shri Ram's representative, now receive their true master once more.

This episode is an important example of the bond between the two brothers, and of the concept of brotherly dharma within Indian cultural tradition.

7. Shri Ram's Coronation

After Shri Ram's return to Ayodhya, his coronation is performed.

The narrative up to the Uttara Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana describes the period of Shri Ram's reign. His rule came, in later Indian tradition, to be connected with the ideal of Ram Rajya.

The coronation is important in this respect, for it completes Shri Ram's progression from prince to king.

8. The Concept of Ram Rajya

Ram Rajya has become an extremely influential symbol of ideal governance in Indian civilization.

In the descriptions relating to Shri Ram's reign in the Ramayana, emphasis is placed on the happiness of the subjects, dharma, justice, and social order.

In later Indian traditions, the meaning of Ram Rajya broadened further. It came to be regarded as the ideal of a rule in which the ruler's principal aim is public welfare and justice.

From a research standpoint, it would not be proper to equate Ram Rajya with any modern political system. It should be understood chiefly as a concept of ideal governance developed within Indian literary and moral tradition.

9. Shri Ram and His Subjects

The Ramayana gives particular importance to the relationship between king and subjects. The ideal of Shri Ram's rule appears to rest on the idea that a king should give greater importance to the welfare of his subjects than to his own personal happiness.

This very idea develops, in later Indian literature, into the duty and rajadharma of a king.

Ayodhya therefore ceases to be merely the king's capital; it becomes the centre of the vision of ideal governance.

10. The Cultural Memory of Ayodhya

After Shri Ram's coronation, the memory of Ayodhya grew ever stronger within Indian religious and cultural tradition.

Because of the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya's identity became bound up with the birth, childhood, exile, and coronation of Shri Ram.

In the centuries that followed, the Puranas, Sanskrit literature, regional Ramayanas, devotional literature, and folk traditions carried this memory forward in various forms.

11. The Valmiki Ramayana and the Later Ram Narrative

An important subject of research in the study of Ayodhya is the similarities and differences between the Valmiki Ramayana and the later traditions of the Ram narrative.

The Ram narrative spread across the various languages of India. Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, the Kamba Ramayanam, the Krittivasi Ramayana, and many other regional traditions presented the story of Shri Ram within their own respective cultural settings.

The religious and cultural image of Ayodhya today has not, therefore, been formed from a single text alone. It is the result of a broad Ram-narrative tradition that developed over many centuries.

12. Ayodhya: From Birthplace to Ideal Capital

The study of the Valmiki Ramayana brings forward three important forms of Ayodhya –

First – the royal city: Dasharatha's capital and the political centre of the kingdom of Kosala.

Second – the birthplace and life-land of Shri Ram: where Shri Ram was born and spent his childhood, and from where he departed for the forest.

Third – the capital of ideal governance: where, after Shri Ram's coronation, the cultural concept of Ram Rajya developed.

These three forms, together, have shaped the long-enduring cultural identity of Ayodhya.

13. A Research Perspective between History and Faith

The purpose of this chapter is not to question faith in Shri Ram, but to understand the description of Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana from a research standpoint.

It is necessary, therefore, that we view literary sources, religious tradition, and archaeological evidence each within its own proper form.

The Valmiki Ramayana is an extremely important literary source for the ancient memory of Shri Ram and Ayodhya. At the same time, understanding the material history of Ayodhya requires the study of archaeological excavation, inscriptions, coins, architectural remains, and other independent sources.

Conclusion

Shri Ram's return to Ayodhya is an important point of completion in the narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana. He returns, once again as king, to the very city from which he had departed for the forest fourteen years earlier.

Bharat's renunciation, Shri Ram's devotion to dharma, and the love of the people — through the combined portrayal of these three, the Ayodhya of the Ramayana emerges as a cultural city in which rajadharma, family propriety, public welfare, and moral ideals are interwoven.

For this reason, Ayodhya's identity has not remained that of an ancient city alone. In the long-enduring memory of Indian civilization, it became the birthplace of Shri Ram, the central land of the Ram narrative, and a city symbolizing ideal governance.

Part 7 of Chapter 3, the final consolidated section, brings together the overall portrayal of Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana, its principal episodes, its literary evidence, and its research findings, thereby completing Chapter 3.

Part 7: Overall Assessment, Research Findings, and References

The portrayal of Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana is of the utmost importance for understanding the ancient urban, political, religious, and cultural memory of Indian civilization. In this text, Ayodhya appears not merely as the land of Shri Ram's birth, but as the capital of Kosala, the centre of Maharaja Dasharatha's reign, the land of Shri Ram's childhood, the witness to his departure for the forest, and, finally, the capital of his coronation.

In the preceding Parts of this chapter, we have seen that the description of Ayodhya is found in the greatest detail chiefly in the Bala Kanda and the Ayodhya Kanda. The Bala Kanda contains episodes relating to Ayodhya, Dasharatha's kingdom, the royal family, the Putrakameshti Yajna, and the birth of Shri Ram, while the Ayodhya Kanda, through the preparations for the coronation, Kaikeyi's boons, Shri Ram's exile, the death of Dasharatha, Bharat's arrival, and the episode of Ram's sandals, presents an extremely powerful political and emotional picture of Ayodhya.

1. Ayodhya: An Ideal Capital

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya is presented as a prosperous and well-ordered capital. The description of the city's roads, buildings, royal palace, gardens, civic life, and religious activity establishes its prestige.

It must be made clear here that the Ramayana's description of the city is not, in the modern sense, a document of urban planning. It is an epic description in which the city's prosperity, splendour, and ideal form are given primary emphasis.

The researcher must, therefore, maintain the distinction between literary description and archaeological evidence.

2. Ayodhya and Rajadharma

Through the episodes concerning Dasharatha and Shri Ram, the Valmiki Ramayana reveals an important form of rajadharma.

Dasharatha finds himself in an extremely difficult situation on account of the word he had given. Shri Ram, too, in order to uphold that same word, accepts the renunciation of the throne.

Thus, in the Ayodhya of the Ramayana, the prestige of the king is bound up not merely with his authority, but with dharma, truth, and duty.

3. Ayodhya and Popular Sentiment

The affection of the citizens of Ayodhya for Shri Ram is one of the most important social aspects of the Ramayana.

The joy of the city at the announcement of the coronation, and the grief of the citizens at the time of the exile, show that the

relationship between king and subjects, in the Ramayana, is not regarded as merely political.

Shri Ram's popularity appears bound up with his personal virtues and his conduct.

4. Bharat's Renunciation

Bharat's character gives a distinct dimension to the political morality of Ayodhya.

Even though the kingdom is within his grasp, he does not accept it as his personal right. He goes to the forest to bring Shri Ram back, and makes his sandals a symbol of Ayodhya's governance.

This episode had an extremely profound influence on the ideals of renunciation, brotherly love, and detachment from power within Indian cultural tradition.

5. Shri Ram's Return and Coronation

Following the victory at Lanka, Shri Ram's return to Ayodhya is an important point of completion in the Ram narrative. He returns to the very city from which he had departed for exile.

His coronation, and the reign that followed it, came to be connected, in later Indian tradition, with the ideal of Ram Rajya.

Ram Rajya has been understood in different senses across different periods, but in a broad sense it became a symbol of justice, dharma, public welfare, and ideal governance.

6. Literary Evidence and Historical Proof

This research treatise adopts a fundamental principle – to present literary sources as literary sources, and archaeological evidence as archaeological evidence.

From the Valmiki Ramayana we obtain important material concerning the literary and cultural memory of Ayodhya. But independent evidence is required to establish the definite historical date, physical location, or archaeological confirmation of any event.

For this reason, in the chapters that follow in this book, the accounts of the Ramayana will be compared with the Puranas, Buddhist and Jain literature, foreign travel accounts, inscriptions, and archaeological evidence.

7. The Long-Enduring Cultural Memory of Ayodhya

After the Valmiki Ramayana, the Ram narrative developed across many Indian languages and traditions. In different periods and regions, the story of Shri Ram acquired new literary and religious forms.

In this process, the cultural identity of Ayodhya became still more extensive.

To understand the Ayodhya of today, therefore, the study of a single text is not sufficient. The Valmiki Ramayana is one of the foundational literary sources, but alongside it, it is also necessary to examine the Puranas, the regional Ramayanas, devotional literature, pilgrimage-glorification texts (tirtha-mahatmya), epigraphic material, and archaeological studies.

8. Research Findings of This Chapter

The study of Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana yields the following principal findings –

1. Ayodhya is presented as the important capital of Kosala.

2. The city is described as prosperous, well-ordered, and distinguished.

3. Maharaja Dasharatha's reign is the principal centre of Ayodhya's political background.

4. Shri Ram's birth, childhood, and royal life are bound up with Ayodhya.

5. The episodes of the coronation and the exile affect the political and social life of Ayodhya.

6. Bharat's character presents an important moral ideal concerning power and renunciation.

7. Shri Ram's return and coronation are of great importance in the cultural memory of Ayodhya.

8. In the Ramayana, Ayodhya appears as a city where religious, royal, and social life converge.

9. It is necessary to study the literary description of the Ramayana and archaeological evidence at their own separate levels.

10. To understand the present cultural identity of Ayodhya, a comparative study of the Valmiki Ramayana together with the later traditions of the Ram narrative and independent historical sources is necessary.

References and Sources

Primary Sources

1. The Valmiki Ramayana – the original Sanskrit text, particularly the Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda, and Uttara Kanda. This has been used for the study, in this chapter, of the episodes relating to Ayodhya, Dasharatha, Shri Ram, Bharat, the exile, and the coronation.

2. A comparative study of ancient and current editions of the Sanskrit text of the Ramayana. Where textual variants exist, it is necessary to bear the critical textual tradition in mind, rather than treating any single edition as universally authoritative without comment.

Secondary Literary Sources

3. Goswami Tulsidas – the Ramcharitmanas. For understanding the later religious and devotional cultural memory of Ayodhya.

4. Material relating to Ayodhya and the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty found in the various Puranas. For an independent study of the Puranas in a later chapter, in particular.

5. References relating to Ayodhya/Saketa in Buddhist and Jain literature. For a comparative study of the multi-religious historical memory of Ayodhya.

Modern Research and Archaeological Sources

6. Reports and publications of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) relating to Ayodhya.

7. Archaeological excavations, architectural remains, and epigraphic studies relating to the Ayodhya region.

8. Research papers, monographs, and critical studies published by modern historians and archaeologists on the history of Ayodhya.

9. University research theses and academic publications relating to Indian archaeology, and ancient Indian history and culture.

A Note on Research Methodology

Wherever this chapter refers to the narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana, it should be understood as the literary source of the Ramayana. Wherever historical or archaeological conclusions are involved, the need for independent evidence has been made clear.

The purpose of this treatise is thus neither to substitute faith for history in the name of history, nor to dismiss historical questions on the basis of faith alone. The purpose is an honest study of the evidence, conducted with respect for faith.

Conclusion of Chapter 3

The portrayal of Ayodhya in the Valmiki Ramayana introduces us to a city that has, for thousands of years, been bound up in

Indian cultural memory with the name of Shri Ram. In the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya is the birthplace, the royal city, the witness to the exile, and, once again, the land of the coronation.

Thus, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya is not merely a place – it is a profound cultural memory of Indian civilization.

ETERNAL AYODHYA

The Birthplace of Shri Ram and Indian Civilization

Researcher: Naresh Das Vaishnav Nimbark

CHAPTER 4

The Description of Ayodhya in the Puranas

Author: Naresh Das Vaishnav Nimbark

Part 1: The Concept of Ayodhya and Its Religious Importance in Puranic Literature

The ancient history of Ayodhya is not confined to the Valmiki Ramayana alone. Ayodhya also finds mention, in various forms, throughout Indian Puranic literature. In the Puranas, Ayodhya appears at times as the city of ancient royal dynasties, at times as the capital connected with the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku tradition, at times as the sacred land of Lord Shri Ram, and at times as a place of pilgrimage and liberation.

A distinctive feature of Puranic literature is that history, genealogy, religious narrative, pilgrimage-glorification (tirtha-mahatmya), geography, and spiritual belief are found interwoven with one another. In studying the Puranic descriptions of Ayodhya, it is

therefore necessary to understand religious narrative, pilgrimage-glorification, and historical information at three separate levels.

1. The Place of Ayodhya in Puranic Literature

The Puranas represent a vast tradition of Indian religious-cultural literature. They contain accounts of creation, the tradition of the gods, royal dynasties, places of pilgrimage, dharma, religious vows, geography, and numerous religious narratives.

The Puranic tradition holds particular importance in relation to Ayodhya, for here the city is connected with the Solar dynasty, the Ikshvaku lineage, and Shri Ram.

Thus, while in the Ramayana, Ayodhya is chiefly the central land of Shri Ram's life and narrative, in the Puranas the character of Ayodhya broadens further, becoming connected with pilgrimage, sacred territory, and holy geography.

2. Ayodhya: The City of the Solar Dynasty

In Puranic traditions, Ayodhya is particularly connected with the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties.

Shri Ram belongs to this very great lineage. The standing of Ayodhya is thus shown to derive not from Shri Ram alone, but also from the long dynastic tradition with which the Ram narrative is connected.

An important subject for our research arises here – the distinction between genealogy and history.

The genealogies given in the Puranas are an important source of the dynastic memory of Indian tradition, but in modern historiography, confirmation from other sources is required before any single generation of a genealogy can be treated as independent historical evidence.

In this treatise, therefore, the Puranic genealogies will first be presented as Puranic tradition, and will later be studied comparatively alongside available epigraphic and other historical evidence.

3. Ayodhya and Shri Ram

In Puranic tradition, the connection between Ayodhya and Shri Ram is extremely deep.

The Vaishnav religious traditions that accept Shri Ram as an incarnation of Vishnu accorded Ayodhya particular importance as his birthplace and sacred territory.

In this process, Ayodhya ceased to be merely an ancient capital. It became a principal centre of devotion to Ram, Vaishnav practice, and pilgrimage.

The tradition of pilgrimage-glorification (tirtha-mahatmya) in the Puranas gives this religious geography its organized form.

4. The Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana

In the Puranic study of Ayodhya, the Ayodhya-Mahatmya, located in the Vaishnav-khanda of the Skanda Purana, is of particular importance. In the available textual tradition, the Ayodhya-Mahatmya describes the glory of Ayodhya's various pilgrimage sites, ponds (kundas), ghats, and religious places.

In this tradition, Ayodhya is viewed as an extremely sacred Vaishnav territory situated on the bank of the Sarayu. It sets out the importance of religious acts such as pilgrim bathing, charity, ancestral rites, and the viewing of deities.

The importance of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya lies also in the fact that it acquaints us with a detailed tradition of the religious geography of Ayodhya.

5. Pilgrimage-Glorification and Sacred Geography

The purpose of 'mahatmya' literature is not merely to provide a geographical description of a place. Its principal purpose is to explain the religious importance of that place and to establish the tradition of pilgrimage to it.

The description of the glory of various pilgrimage sites and sacred places in the Ayodhya-Mahatmya is composed with precisely this purpose. The available text mentions Vishnu-Hari, Brahma-kunda,

Sahasradhara, Swargadwar, Dharma-Hari, and other pilgrimage sites.

This shows that the Puranic Ayodhya is not merely the concept of a city, but a religious landscape built of many sacred sites.

6. The Sarayu and Ayodhya

In Puranic tradition, the relationship between the river Sarayu and Ayodhya is of great importance.

The tradition of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya connects Ayodhya's pilgrimage sites with the bank of the Sarayu and the sacred geography around it. In this way, the Sarayu ceases to be merely a river; it becomes the principal axis of the religious life of Ayodhya.

Later in this chapter, the Puranic narratives relating to the Sarayu and its significance as a place of pilgrimage will be studied independently.

7. Caution in the Study of Puranic Sources

It is necessary here to record an extremely important point for this research treatise.

The 'Puranas' are not a single, unchanging body of texts composed at one time. The composition, compilation, re-editing, and textual traditions of the various Puranas developed over a

long period. It would not, therefore, be proper to treat the currently available text of any Purana directly as the document of one fixed historical period.

In particular, with regard to the textual tradition of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya, discussion exists among scholars concerning the structure of the text and the dates of its various layers. Scholarly material cited even in judicial records notes disagreements concerning its text, manuscripts, and later additions.

For this reason, rather than declaring any single position to be final truth, this book will record the available text, its tradition, and scholarly opinion each separately.

8. Religious Evidence and Historical Evidence

Where the Puranas describe the glory of a pilgrimage site, the narrative of a king, or a religious event, that description is important evidence of the religious-cultural significance of that tradition.

But to establish the definite historical date or physical location of any event, other independent sources are required alongside it.

The research method of this chapter will therefore be: Puranic description → textual tradition → other literary sources → epigraphic evidence → archaeological evidence → comparative conclusion.

It is this method that will give this treatise the character of a work of research, rather than merely a collection of religious narratives.

9. The Sacred Geography of Ayodhya

Puranic literature strengthened the tradition of viewing Ayodhya as an extensive pilgrimage territory. Here, river, ghat, pond, temple, and pilgrimage site all appear interconnected.

The importance of this sacred geography is seen, further on, in the development of Ayodhya's pilgrimage tradition.

The available material of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya provides a systematic account of the glory of many pilgrimage sites. This helps us understand how, from a religious standpoint, Ayodhya came to be viewed as a sacred territory of many places of pilgrimage.

Conclusion of Part 1

The character of Ayodhya in Puranic literature appears as a far broader religious geography than in the Valmiki Ramayana. Here, Ayodhya's connection is established with the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty, Shri Ram, the Sarayu, and numerous pilgrimage sites.

The Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana, in particular, provides a detailed account of the glory of many sacred sites of Ayodhya.

But the honest method of research is to understand these Puranic descriptions within their religious and literary nature, and to seek independent evidence to confirm their historical aspect.

In Part 2, we shall examine comparatively the references to Ayodhya and the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty found in the Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Padma Purana, Skanda Purana, and others, and, wherever differences exist, we shall clearly record both positions.

Part 2: Ayodhya, the Ikshvaku Dynasty, and Shri Ram in Various Puranas

Ayodhya is not mentioned uniformly across Puranic literature. In different Puranas, its character appears sometimes as dynastic tradition, sometimes as the narrative of Shri Ram, sometimes as pilgrimage-glorification, and sometimes as sacred geography. For the Puranic study of Ayodhya, it is therefore necessary to read the various texts separately.

1. Ayodhya and the Ikshvaku Tradition in the Vishnu Purana

The Vishnu Purana contains an important account of the dynastic tradition of the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku lineage. The tradition of many kings is presented, beginning with Vaivasvata Manu and proceeding through Ikshvaku. It is within this very dynastic tradition that Shri Ram's place is found.

This material of the Vishnu Purana is important for the study of Ayodhya because it shows that Puranic tradition places Shri Ram not as an isolated narrative figure, but within a long dynastic tradition.

Some differences may be found in the names and order of kings across different Puranas. It would not, therefore, be proper, in presenting the genealogy, to treat the list of any single Purana as the universally agreed list of all the Puranas.

2. The Vayu Purana and Dynastic Tradition

The Vayu Purana is counted among the important Puranic sources for the study of ancient Indian dynastic traditions. It contains material relating to the Solar dynasty and other royal lineages.

Its importance in relation to Ayodhya lies chiefly in understanding the dynastic memory in which the tradition of Ikshvaku and his successors was preserved.

Puranic genealogies have been a subject of particular interest to historians, but independent evidence is required to establish their historical date and the identity of the actual kings.

It would therefore be more proper, in this book, to record the Puranic genealogy as traditional dynastic memory.

3. The Solar Dynasty in the Brahmanda Purana

The Brahmanda Purana, too, contains material relating to dynastic traditions and ancient kings. The mention of Shri Ram within the tradition of the Solar dynasty further strengthens the royal memory of Ayodhya.

An important point here is that, in the Puranas, the narrative of Shri Ram is not merely a religious tale; he is also placed within the continuity of a royal dynasty.

This brings forward two aspects of Ayodhya's identity – Ayodhya is both a religious city and the memory of a dynastic capital.

4. Ayodhya in the Padma Purana

The various textual traditions of the Padma Purana contain an extensive account of the glory of pilgrimage sites and sacred places. Ayodhya, too, is included among the important sites of Vaishnav religious geography.

In the religious outlook of the Padma Purana, particular importance is given to pilgrimage, bathing, charity, religious vows, and remembrance of God.

Material relating to Ayodhya should be understood within this broad tradition of pilgrimage-glorification.

5. The Skanda Purana and the Ayodhya-Mahatmya

In the Puranic study of Ayodhya, the Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana is of particular importance.

It contains an account of the glory of Ayodhya's many pilgrimage sites, ponds, ghats, and religious places. In this way, Ayodhya appears here not merely as a historical city, but as an extensive pilgrimage territory.

The Ayodhya-Mahatmya describes the religious merit of various pilgrimage sites and the narratives connected with them. This

material is useful for studying the historical development of Ayodhya's religious geography.

Alongside this, however, the caution is also necessary that the purpose of pilgrimage-glorification is not, in the modern sense, to write history. Its principal purpose is to establish the religious importance of the pilgrimage site.

6. The Garuda Purana and the Religious Tradition of Ayodhya

The Garuda Purana is chiefly known for subjects such as dharma, funerary rites, the afterlife, and atonement, but the concept of pilgrimage sites and sacred places is also important within its broader religious tradition.

In the study of Ayodhya, such references should be understood not directly as evidence of the city's political history, but in the context of sacred geography and religious consciousness.

7. The Agni Purana and the Ram Narrative

The Agni Purana contains material relating to the Ram narrative. This indicates that the Ram narrative had entered many streams of Puranic literature.

This broad presence of the Ram narrative is important for understanding the expansion of Ayodhya's cultural memory.

Here we see a wide-ranging process – the narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana is presented anew, in later religious literature, with new contexts and interpretations.

8. The Religious Character of Shri Ram in the Puranas

In Puranic literature, the character of Shri Ram gradually and increasingly clearly becomes connected with the incarnation of Vishnu.

This is an important subject for the study of the development of Vaishnav religious tradition.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, particular emphasis appears on the human and royal qualities of Shri Ram's character, whereas in later Vaishnav traditions his divine and incarnate character becomes increasingly prominent.

This transformation is also important for understanding the development of Ayodhya's religious identity.

9. Ayodhya: From Dynasty to Pilgrimage

Reading the various Puranas together, several levels in the development of Ayodhya's identity become visible.

The first level – dynastic Ayodhya: the capital of the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties.

The second level – narrative Ayodhya: the city connected with the birth and life of Shri Ram.

The third level – Vaishnav Ayodhya: the sacred land of Shri Ram, the incarnation of Vishnu.

The fourth level – pilgrimage Ayodhya: a sacred territory furnished with numerous pilgrimage sites, ghats, ponds, and religious places.

Together, all these levels built the long-enduring religious-cultural identity of Ayodhya.

10. The Historical Utility of Puranic Genealogies

The genealogies of the Puranas are important material for historians. They preserve the names and dynastic order of many kings.

But the historical utility of these genealogies must be assessed with care.

If the name of a king or dynasty is found in a Purana, that is evidence of its remembrance within that tradition. But to establish the definite date of his reign, inscriptions, coins, contemporary literature, or other independent sources may be required.

This research treatise will therefore treat genealogy as one level of evidence, not as the final and sole proof.

11. Textual Variants Across Different Puranas

An important feature of the Puranas is their long textual tradition. Differences may be found, across different editions and manuscripts, in chapters, verse numbers, and certain details.

For this reason, it would not be proper, from a research standpoint, to treat a single text available on some internet website or in a modern compilation, without examination, as the 'original and final Puranic text'.

Wherever necessary, this book will give priority to authenticated editions of the Sanskrit text, critical studies, and published scholarly research.

12. The Direction of Research

Three kinds of questions will be important, going forward, in understanding the Puranic history of Ayodhya –

(a) Which is the oldest available mention of Ayodhya in the Puranas?

(b) What similarities and differences exist between the various Puranas concerning Ayodhya and the Ikshvaku-Solar tradition?

(c) How far can the sacred geography described in Ayodhya's pilgrimage-glorification literature be connected with the sites of present-day Ayodhya?

The answers to these questions must be sought not from religious texts alone, but by taking together textual criticism, history, archaeology, geography, and epigraphic study.

Conclusion of Part 2

The study of the various Puranas makes clear that the Puranic image of Ayodhya is multidimensional. It appears as the royal city of the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty, the birthplace of Shri Ram, the sacred land of the incarnation of Vishnu, and an extensive pilgrimage territory.

But it would not be proper to treat all the Puranas as the same kind of historical source. In some, genealogy is prominent; in others, the Ram narrative; in others, pilgrimage-glorification; and in others, sacred geography.

Accepting precisely this diversity will remain part of the honest research method of this treatise.

In Part 3, we shall undertake a systematic study specifically of the pilgrimage sites, the Sarayu, the ghats, the ponds, and the sacred places of Ayodhya as described in the Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana.

Part 3: The Ayodhya-Mahatmya, the Sarayu, and the Sacred Pilgrimage Tradition

The most distinctive character of Ayodhya in Puranic literature appears in its pilgrimage-glorification. Here, the city is not merely the capital of kings and dynasties; it is a sacred territory in which river, ghat, pond, temple, and pilgrimage site are mutually interconnected.

To understand this religious geography of Ayodhya, the study of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana holds particular importance. It contains an account of the glory of Ayodhya's various pilgrimage sites, the religious narratives connected with them, and the tradition of pilgrimage.

1. The Concept of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya

The general purpose of a 'mahatmya' is to establish the religious importance of a sacred place. It describes the religious merit connected with viewing, bathing at, worshipping, or performing other religious acts at that place.

In reading the Ayodhya-Mahatmya, therefore, it is necessary to keep two levels distinct.

First – the religious level: the tradition that regards Ayodhya as a sacred place of pilgrimage.

Second – the historical level: the study of when, and in what manner, that pilgrimage tradition developed.

The description, in a mahatmya, of the religious glory of a place is itself important evidence for the study of that religious tradition, but it does not, by itself, establish a definite archaeological date for the antiquity of that site.

2. The Sarayu: The Religious Axis of Ayodhya

The river Sarayu occupies an extremely important place in the sacred geography of Ayodhya.

The relationship between Ayodhya and the Sarayu appears in both the Ramayana and the Puranic tradition. In the religious identity of Ayodhya, situated on the bank of the Sarayu, the river ceases to be merely a natural watercourse, and becomes an important centre of pilgrimage, bathing, and religious ritual.

The tradition of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya mentions many religious sites and bathing traditions connected with the Sarayu.

For this reason, it is difficult to study the pilgrimage tradition of Ayodhya in separation from the Sarayu.

3. The Tradition of Pilgrim Bathing

In Puranic mahatmya literature, particular religious importance is given to bathing at pilgrimage sites.

In relation to Ayodhya, too, the text describes the glory of bathing in the Sarayu, of viewing the various pilgrimage sites, and of religious acts.

The purpose of these descriptions was to encourage pilgrims toward religious faith and spiritual practice. They therefore provide important information about the pilgrimage consciousness and religious beliefs of that time.

But it would not be proper to place the religious claims of merit associated with bathing within the category of modern historical evidence. They are part of religious belief and Puranic tradition.

4. Swargadwar and the Pilgrimage Tradition of Ayodhya

Among the principal religious sites of Ayodhya, the mention of Swargadwar is found in Puranic tradition.

From its name and religious importance, it is clear that this site has been connected with religious conceptions relating to death, liberation, and purity.

The description of such sites in the Ayodhya-Mahatmya establishes Ayodhya not merely as the birthplace of Shri Ram, but further, as a city of liberation and pilgrimage.

5. Brahma-kunda and Other Sacred Sites

Puranic tradition also mentions various ponds (kundas) of Ayodhya. In Indian pilgrimage tradition, kundas are not merely sources of water; they are sacred places connected with religious ritual and memory.

The tradition of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya describes the glory of many sacred places, including Brahma-kunda.

In studying the present-day identification of these sites, it will be necessary to compare ancient texts, local traditions, archaeological material, and modern site-tradition, all together.

6. Vishnu-Hari and the Vaishnav Tradition

In the Puranic religious geography of Ayodhya, the mention of pilgrimage names such as Vishnu-Hari is found.

Such names point toward the Vaishnav religious identity of Ayodhya. With the spread of the tradition that regards Shri Ram as an incarnation of Vishnu, Ayodhya's connection with the Vaishnav pilgrimage tradition grew stronger still.

Here we see an important development in the religious history of Ayodhya – from dynastic memory to Vaishnav pilgrimage.

7. Dharma-Hari and Pilgrimage Memory

The Ayodhya-Mahatmya also mentions various pilgrimage sites connected with dharma. Among these, names such as Dharma-

Hari show the connection between religious concepts and pilgrimage sites.

Where different opinions or local traditions exist in the modern period regarding the identification of such pilgrimage sites, they should be recorded separately in this research treatise.

It would not be proper to declare a present-day site an ancient Puranic site merely on the basis of similarity of name.

8. The Tradition of Sahasradhara

The religious geography of Ayodhya also mentions Sahasradhara.

The name Sahasradhara is connected, in Indian religious tradition, with the concept of water and sacred bathing. Its importance, in relation to Ayodhya, should be understood within the Puranic pilgrimage tradition.

To identify its present-day geographical location, a comparative study of local site-tradition together with ancient texts and historical maps is necessary.

9. The Many Pilgrimage Sites of Ayodhya

One of the most important features of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya is the inclusion of many pilgrimage sites within a single sacred territory.

In this religious geography, river, ghat, pond, temple, and various pilgrimage sites are interconnected.

For this reason, pilgrimage to Ayodhya is not confined merely to the viewing of one temple. It becomes an extensive religious journey, encompassing the circuit of many sacred places.

10. Pilgrimage-Glorification and the Pilgrim

One purpose of mahatmya literature was also to provide religious guidance to pilgrims.

Which pilgrimage site one should bathe at, which deity one should worship, which religious act is connected with which place – all of this is described in the tradition of pilgrimage-glorification literature.

From this standpoint, the Ayodhya-Mahatmya is not merely a religious narrative, but also a source for the study of pilgrimage culture.

11. Puranic Ayodhya and Present-Day Ayodhya

Today, Ayodhya contains many ghats, temples, ponds, and religious places. The names of some of these appear connected with Puranic traditions.

But mere similarity of name is not sufficient to establish the antiquity of a modern site.

For a scientific study, the following forms of evidence must be compared: the ancient Sanskrit text; the various manuscripts; old travel accounts; inscriptions and epigraphs; archaeological remains; old maps; local oral tradition; and the historical continuity of the modern site.

In this way, the identification of a site can be established more reliably.

12. Religious Faith and Historical Research

In studying a place of pilgrimage such as Ayodhya, the researcher faces a particular challenge. Here, both religious faith and history are present as extremely strong traditions.

Our approach in this treatise will remain clear – respect for faith, examination of evidence, and the honest recording of disagreements.

If a fact is described in a religious text, it will be presented under the name of that very source. If independent archaeological confirmation of some matter is available, it will be given as independent evidence. And if a subject remains disputed or uncertain, that too will be clearly stated.

13. The Sacred Geography of Ayodhya

In Puranic tradition, the sacred geography of Ayodhya is a broad concept.

The Sarayu is its natural and religious axis. The ghats, ponds, temples, and pilgrimage sites around it give this geography its completeness.

In this way, the meaning of Ayodhya in the Puranas is not confined to the boundaries of a city. It appears to develop as a pilgrimage territory and a religious-cultural landscape.

14. Its Importance for the Historian

The Ayodhya-Mahatmya provides the historian with two important kinds of information.

First, it shows how religious communities remembered and regarded Ayodhya as sacred.

Second, the list of pilgrimage sites and religious places described in it gives us a basis for studying the development of Ayodhya's religious geography.

Alongside this, however, it must also be kept in mind that the religious glory of a pilgrimage site and the date of its physical construction are two separate questions.

It would not be proper, from a research standpoint, to treat these two as one and the same.

Conclusion of Part 3

The Puranic tradition, including the Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Skanda Purana, presents Ayodhya as an extensive sacred pilgrimage territory.

The Sarayu, the ghats, the ponds, the temples, and the pilgrimage sites together form the religious geography of Ayodhya. In this tradition, Ayodhya, alongside being the royal city connected with Shri Ram, also becomes the land of Vaishnav devotion, pilgrimage, and liberation-consciousness.

But throughout this entire study, it is necessary to maintain a scientific limit – Puranic descriptions are religious-cultural evidence; independent evidence is required to establish the definite historical date or archaeological antiquity of any site.

In Part 4 that follows, we shall examine, in still greater depth, Shri Ram, the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty, and the dynastic tradition of Ayodhya in the Puranas, and shall record, from a research standpoint, the similarities and textual variants found among the genealogies of the various Puranas.

Part 4: The Ikshvaku-Solar Dynasty, Shri Ram, and the Dynastic Tradition of Ayodhya

To understand the ancient identity of Ayodhya, the study of the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasty tradition connected with it is of great importance. In many places within Indian Puranic literature, genealogies of ancient royal dynasties are given, describing the tradition from Ikshvaku through to Shri Ram and his successors.

This material is an important part of the dynastic memory preserved in Indian tradition. But a scientific study of history requires that genealogy, religious tradition, and independent historical evidence be kept distinct from one another, and examined comparatively.

1. Vaivasvata Manu and Ikshvaku

According to Puranic tradition, the royal lineage of the Solar dynasty is connected with Vaivasvata Manu. Among Manu's sons, Ikshvaku is given a particular place.

Ikshvaku is regarded as the founding chief king of that royal lineage of the Solar dynasty from which many celebrated kings later arose.

The importance of Ikshvaku, in relation to Ayodhya, increases further, for tradition connects him with the sovereignty of Ayodhya.

It must be made clear here that differences may be found, across various Puranas, in the details of the genealogy and the order of kings. It would not, therefore, be proper to treat the list of any single Purana as the final and universally accepted genealogy of all the Puranas.

2. From Ikshvaku to the Solar Dynasty Tradition

After Ikshvaku, the mention of many kings is found in the Puranic genealogies. Over time, this tradition became renowned by the name of the Solar dynasty.

This lineage includes many names that are extremely celebrated in Indian religious and literary tradition.

Among these, Sagara, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, and Shri Ram are particularly noteworthy.

However, the order, detail, and narrative context of these kings are not identical across all the Puranas. For this reason, in preparing the genealogy in this book, a comparative study of the various sources will be necessary.

3. Maharaja Sagara

Maharaja Sagara holds particular importance in the tradition of the Solar dynasty.

The narrative connected with him is celebrated in the Indian Puranas and in the tradition of the Ram narrative. The story connected with Sagara's sons and his lineage later becomes connected with the descent of the Ganga upon the earth.

From this point, the dynastic tradition of Ayodhya ceases to be merely political history, and becomes connected also with religious narrative and Indian cultural memory.

4. King Bhagiratha and the Ganga

The story of Bhagiratha, a descendant of Sagara, is of great importance in Indian religious tradition.

According to Puranic narrative, Bhagiratha undertook severe austerities in order to bring the Ganga down to earth for the deliverance of his ancestors. Lord Shiva bore the force of the Ganga's descent, after which the Ganga flowed upon the earth.

This story of Bhagiratha became, in Indian culture, a symbol of duty toward one's ancestors, of austerity, and of firm resolve.

From a historical standpoint, this narrative should be recorded as religious narrative. The study of the actual geographical and fluvial history of the Ganga is undertaken through a different kind of scientific source.

5. Raghu and the Raghu Dynasty

The name Raghu is particularly celebrated in the tradition of the Solar dynasty.

Later, Shri Ram's lineage came to be viewed in connection with the 'Raghuvamsha' (the dynasty of Raghu). The great poet Kalidasa, in his celebrated epic Raghuvamsha, gave literary form to precisely this dynastic tradition.

This makes clear that the dynastic memory of Ayodhya and Shri Ram was not confined to the Puranas alone, but developed also in other great works of Sanskrit literature.

6. Aja and Dasharatha

In the tradition following Raghu, the name of Aja is found, and after him, the mention of Dasharatha's sovereignty.

Maharaja Dasharatha is that very king who is described as the father of Shri Ram.

The place of Dasharatha and Shri Ram is of great importance in both the Valmiki Ramayana and the Puranic genealogies, although the purpose and narrative style of the different texts vary.

7. Shri Ram: The Central Link of the Solar Dynasty

In Puranic tradition, Shri Ram is presented as a great link in the Solar dynasty.

He is not merely the son of Dasharatha, but the representative of a long dynastic tradition. In Vaishnav tradition, he is established as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Thus, three principal dimensions appear together in the personality of Shri Ram – the dynastic dimension (a king of the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty); the literary dimension (the central hero of the Ram narrative); the religious dimension (the incarnation of Vishnu).

These three dimensions, together, gave extremely profound influence to the identity of Ayodhya.

8. Ram's Successors

In Puranic tradition, the mention of Shri Ram's sons is also found after him. Generally, the names Kusha and Lava appear as the sons of Ram.

Different traditions give different accounts concerning the two. In later traditions, Kusha's connection with Ayodhya is particularly emphasized.

Here too, it is necessary, from a research standpoint, to distinguish between the original source and the later tradition.

9. Genealogy and History

Puranic genealogies are important for history, but they must be used with care.

The presence of a king's name in a genealogy is important evidence for the existence of his memory and tradition. But other independent sources may be required to establish the definite date of his reign or his actual historical existence.

In our research treatise, therefore, the genealogy will be compared with the following sources – the Valmiki Ramayana; the various Puranas; Sanskrit epics and other literature; Buddhist literature; Jain literature; inscriptions; coins; archaeological evidence; modern historical research.

10. Textual Variants in the Genealogies of the Puranas

An important research finding is that the lists of kings in different Puranas show similarities alongside differences.

In one place a king's name appears in a different form; in another, the order of generations changes; and in another, additional kings are mentioned.

This does not mean that the entire tradition is false, nor that any single list should be treated verbatim as modern history.

Rather, these differences help us understand that the Puranic dynastic memory developed and was preserved over a long period.

11. The Dynastic Memory of Ayodhya

The most important outcome of these genealogies is that the identity of Ayodhya does not remain that of a mere city.

It is remembered as a capital connected with a long dynastic tradition.

The tradition from Ikshvaku to Shri Ram gave Ayodhya a distinctive place in Indian cultural memory.

12. Religious Tradition and Historical Study

The tradition of the Solar dynasty is held in extremely high regard in Indian religion and culture. Its study, therefore, requires a balance of reverence and research.

The purpose of this treatise is not to reject tradition. The purpose is that, wherever Puranic tradition exists, it be recorded as Puranic tradition, and wherever independent historical evidence is available, it be presented separately.

This will enable the reader to understand, for themselves, from what kind of source each fact has been drawn.

Conclusion of Part 4

In Puranic tradition, the identity of Ayodhya is deeply connected with the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties. Names such as Vaivasvata Manu, Ikshvaku, Sagara, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, and Shri Ram are the principal milestones of this dynastic memory.

Shri Ram becomes the most celebrated figure of this tradition, and because of him, the dynastic identity of Ayodhya later becomes deeply connected with religious and pilgrimage tradition as well.

But the differences found in the order and details of the genealogy across various Puranas teach us that the researcher must adopt a comparative method.

This treatise will therefore present the genealogy of the Solar dynasty with respect for tradition, but will not declare it to be proven history wherever independent historical evidence is not available.

In Part 5 that follows, we shall study the religious glory of Ayodhya in the Puranas, devotion to Shri Ram, pilgrimage, charity, bathing, and the concept of liberation, and shall see how Ayodhya, moving beyond a mere royal city, became established as a great place of pilgrimage.

Part 5: The Pilgrimage-Glorification of Ayodhya, Devotion to Shri Ram, and the Tradition of Liberation

In Puranic literature, one extremely important character of Ayodhya is that of a pilgrimage city. While in the Ramayana, Ayodhya appears prominently as the capital of Shri Ram's life and of the Ikshvaku dynasty, in Puranic tradition its religious character appears to expand further.

The mahatmya literature relating to Ayodhya describes religious beliefs connected with the city's various pilgrimage sites, the Sarayu, bathing, charity, worship, religious vows, and liberation. This helps us understand how Ayodhya came to be viewed, within Indian religious tradition, as a sacred territory.

1. The Indian Concept of Tirtha (Pilgrimage)

The root meaning of the word 'tirtha' is generally held to relate to a place of crossing over, or a ford. In religious tradition, a tirtha becomes that place where a person rises above worldly life in an effort at religious practice, remembrance, and spiritual purification.

In Indian tradition, rivers, mountains, forests, lakes, ponds, temples, and ancient cities became established as places of pilgrimage.

Ayodhya became an important centre of precisely this broad pilgrimage tradition.

2. Ayodhya and Bathing in the Sarayu

Bathing in the Sarayu holds particular importance in the Puranic Ayodhya.

The Sarayu was regarded not merely as a river flowing past Ayodhya, but was connected with religious purification and pilgrimage.

In pilgrimage-glorification literature, bathing in a sacred river is connected with religious merit. This is important for understanding the religious consciousness of that time.

Here it is necessary, from a research standpoint, to make clear that the religious merit obtained from bathing is a matter of Puranic faith; it cannot be presented as a modern scientific claim.

3. The Tradition of Charity

In the Puranas, particular importance is also given to charity at places of pilgrimage.

The giving of food, clothing, cattle, gold, and other kinds of charity is connected with religious merit. In the broad religious tradition of the Ayodhya-Mahatmya, too, the concept of charity and religious acts performed by pilgrims appears.

The social aspect of charity is also important. Through religious charity, pilgrimage sites, monasteries, holy men, and religious institutions obtained resources from society.

Thus, charity was not merely a religious act; it also played a role in building the pilgrimage-based social order of India.

4. Religious Vows and Rituals

In Puranic tradition, various religious vows and rituals have been connected with pilgrimage.

In Ayodhya, traditions developed of bathing, worship, charity, and the viewing of deities on religious festivals and particular dates.

These religious rituals did not allow Ayodhya to remain merely a city of permanent temples; they also transformed it into a centre of time-based religious activity.

5. The Expansion of Devotion to Shri Ram

The greatest foundation of Ayodhya's religious identity is its connection with Shri Ram.

In Puranic and later Vaishnav traditions, the belief that Shri Ram was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu grew stronger. Because of this, Ayodhya's standing developed as a principal place of pilgrimage to Ram.

Pilgrims do not view Ayodhya merely as an ancient capital, but as the birthplace of Shri Ram and the land of his divine acts (lila).

6. Devotion to Ram and the Vaishnav Tradition

Vaishnav traditions made an important contribution to the development of Ayodhya's religious identity.

The Ramanandi and other Vaishnav ascetic traditions played a role in developing Ayodhya as a principal centre of practice, devotion, and pilgrimage.

However, since the principal subject of this chapter is the Puranas, we shall examine the detailed history of these sects independently in Chapters 14 and 15.

It is sufficient to record here only that the Puranic concept of Ram-tirtha, and the later Vaishnav devotional tradition, enriched the religious identity of Ayodhya at different historical stages.

7. The Concept of Liberation (Moksha)

In Indian pilgrimage tradition, many sacred cities are connected with liberation. Ayodhya, too, is connected with such religious concepts.

In Puranic literature, the viewing of sacred land, rivers, and pilgrimage sites, and the performance of religious acts, are connected with spiritual welfare.

For this reason, the religious importance of Ayodhya is not confined to its being a birthplace alone. It becomes connected also with the Indian religious conception of life, death, and liberation.

8. The Saptapuri and Ayodhya

In Indian religious tradition, Ayodhya is given a place among the Saptapuri (the seven sacred cities).

Traditionally, seven liberation-bestowing cities are mentioned — Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika, and Dwarka.

Some differences in names or order may be found across different texts and textual traditions, but Ayodhya's place within the Saptapuri tradition is of great importance.

This concept gives Ayodhya's religious standing a broad, pan-Indian context.

9. Ayodhya and the Pan-Indian Pilgrimage Tradition

Through the concept of the Saptapuri, Ayodhya's connection is not confined to northern India alone.

For pilgrims coming from various regions of India, Ayodhya becomes a pan-Indian religious centre.

A pilgrim coming here becomes part of the local religious tradition while also connecting with the broader pilgrimage culture of India.

From this standpoint, Ayodhya is also an important subject for the study of Indian cultural unity.

10. Pilgrimage and the Local Economy

The pilgrimage tradition also has a social and economic aspect.

When large numbers of pilgrims come to a city, rest-houses, eateries, markets, boat services, ritual materials, transport, and other services develop.

In this way, pilgrimage does not remain merely a religious activity; it also influences the life and economy of local society.

This aspect deserves further independent consideration in the historical study of Ayodhya.

11. The Language of Pilgrimage-Glorification

Mahatmya literature employs extremely powerful language in order to create religious impact.

Describing the viewing of, or bathing at, a pilgrimage site as exceedingly meritorious is part of this very style.

The researcher should, therefore, understand such descriptions as belonging to religious-literary style.

If a mahatmya describes a pilgrimage site as extremely ancient or extremely meritorious, separate sources will be required to examine its historical aspect.

12. The Balance between Faith and Evidence

It is necessary to restate here, once again, one core policy of this research treatise – what is stated in a Purana will be accepted within the context of that Purana; what is confirmed by history or archaeology will be presented on the basis of that evidence.

The two will not, without examination, be made substitutes for one another.

In this way, the book will maintain both respect for faith and the reliability of research.

13. The Religious Continuity of Ayodhya

An important aspect of Puranic tradition is religious continuity.

The memory of Ayodhya connected with the Ramayana appears, in later Puranas, in the form of pilgrimage-glorification, and, further on, becomes still more extensive in devotional literature and the tradition of saints.

Thus, the religious identity of Ayodhya is more complex than the simple notion that it was suddenly created at a single period. It is a cultural process that developed over many centuries.

14. From the Puranas to the Modern Pilgrimage

Behind the religious sites visited by devotees in present-day Ayodhya lie traditions of many layers.

The identification of some sites is connected with Puranic names, some with local traditions, and the modern religious development of some may be relatively recent.

For this reason, this book will ask three questions in studying each important site – what do the ancient sources say? What do the medieval and modern sources say? What do the archaeological or epigraphic sources say?

It is through the comparative study of precisely these three levels that a more reliable conclusion will be obtained.

Conclusion of Part 5

In Puranic tradition, Ayodhya is not merely the birthplace of Shri Ram. It is a sacred city connected with the religious concepts of pilgrimage, the Sarayu, bathing, charity, religious vows, devotion to Ram, and liberation.

The Saptapuri tradition gave Ayodhya a special place within the pan-Indian pilgrimage tradition. Later, the traditions of devotion to Ram and Vaishnav saints strengthened this religious identity still further.

But in undertaking a historical study of this religious glory, it is necessary to keep the nature of the sources clear. Mahatmya literature is an important source of religious faith and pilgrimage culture; every religious merit or narrative cannot automatically be treated as historical fact.

Thus, the Puranic character of Ayodhya acquaints us with that aspect of Indian civilization in which city, river, pilgrimage, deity, dynasty, and popular faith come together to form a broad cultural landscape.

Part 6: Consolidated Findings and References

In the preceding five Parts, we have studied the various forms of Ayodhya in Puranic literature. This study makes clear that the Puranic image of Ayodhya is not uniform. In one place it is the capital of the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty, in another the sacred land of Shri Ram, in another a place of pilgrimage on the bank of the Sarayu, and in another a liberation-bestowing city furnished with numerous pilgrimage sites and religious places.

To understand the Puranic history of Ayodhya, it is therefore necessary to consider together the various Puranas, the literature of the Ram narrative, pilgrimage-glorification, historical studies, and archaeological sources.

1. Principal Puranic Sources

1. Vishnu Purana – The Vishnu Purana, particularly its chapters relating to genealogy, is an important source for the study of the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku tradition. It contains the dynastic tradition beginning with Vaivasvata Manu, and the mention of Ikshvaku and his successive kings. Shri Ram is placed within this very dynastic tradition. Reference: Vishnu Purana, Part 4, chapters relating to the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku dynasty.

2. Vayu Purana – The Vayu Purana is an important Puranic source for the study of ancient dynasties and genealogies.

Material relating to the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku tradition is useful for understanding the Puranic dynastic memory of Ayodhya's history. Reference: Vayu Purana, chapters relating to dynasty and the Solar dynasty.

3. Brahmanda Purana – The Brahmanda Purana, too, contains material relating to ancient dynasties and the Solar dynasty. It can be used comparatively in the study of Ayodhya's royal and narrative memory. Reference: Brahmanda Purana, Purva-bhaga, chapters relating to dynasty.

4. Padma Purana – The Padma Purana contains extensive literature on the glory of pilgrimage sites and religious places. Its material is useful for studying the religious character of Ayodhya and the Vaishnav pilgrimage tradition. Reference: Padma Purana, Uttara-khanda, and material relating to pilgrimage-glorification.

5. Skanda Purana – In the study of the religious geography of Ayodhya, the Ayodhya-Mahatmya of the Vaishnav-khanda of the Skanda Purana holds particular importance. It contains an account of the glory of Ayodhya's various pilgrimage sites, the Sarayu, and religious places. Reference: Skanda Purana, Vaishnav-khanda, Ayodhya-Mahatmya.

2. The Primary Literary Source of the Ram Narrative

6. The Valmiki Ramayana – The most important primary literary source for the study of Ayodhya is the Ramayana of the sage Valmiki. In particular, the study of the Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda, and Uttara Kanda is necessary. This text provides the political, social, and cultural picture of Ayodhya, and contains the account of principal episodes such as the birth of Shri Ram, his departure for the forest, the character of Bharat, and his return to Ayodhya. Reference: Valmiki Ramayana, critical/authenticated Sanskrit text and various accepted editions.

3. Later Literature of the Ram Narrative

7. Ramcharitmanas – Goswami Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas made the memory of Ayodhya and Shri Ram extremely widespread within the religious and cultural consciousness of northern India. In particular, the Bala Kanda and Ayodhya Kanda are important for studying the devotional image of Ayodhya. Reference: Goswami Tulsidas, Ramcharitmanas.

8. Raghuvamsha – The great poet Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha is an important source for the study of the literary tradition of the Solar dynasty and the kings of the Raghu lineage. It helps us understand how the memory of Shri Ram and his dynasty developed, outside the Puranas, in Sanskrit literature. Reference: Kalidasa, Raghuvamsha.

4. Modern Historical and Archaeological Sources

9. Archaeological Survey of India – In the study of the archaeological history of Ayodhya, the reports, excavation reports, and related publications of the Archaeological Survey of India are important. In using archaeological sources, it is necessary to understand separately the artefact recovered from excavation, its stratum, its dating, and the conclusions drawn from it. Reference: Archaeological Survey of India – archaeological reports and publications relating to Ayodhya.

10. Judicial Records Relating to Ayodhya – In the judicial records relating to the Ayodhya dispute, consideration has been given to various historical texts, Puranas, travel accounts, archaeological reports, and scholarly opinions. In using these records, it is necessary to keep the court's judgment, the sources cited, and the claims presented by any party each distinct from the others. Reference: Supreme Court of India, M. Siddiq (D) Thr. Lrs. v. Mahant Suresh Das & Ors., judgment dated 9 November 2019, and related records.

5. Principal Modern Studies on Research Method

To understand the history of Ayodhya, a comparative study of the work of modern historians and archaeologists is also necessary.

Scholars holding different viewpoints should be read equally. Where the conclusions of two scholars differ, the basis and evidence of both views should be presented, rather than selecting only the view that is convenient.

This will remain the fundamental method of this research treatise.

6. The Research Method for the Use of References

In giving references further on in this chapter, the following order will be more appropriate to follow: primary source → textual edition → modern research → archaeological evidence → comparative conclusion.

For example, if the name of a pilgrimage site is found in the Skanda Purana, the Purana will be cited first. If any modern claim exists regarding the present-day identification of that same pilgrimage site, it will be examined from a separate source.

Similarly, if the genealogy of a dynasty is found in the Vishnu Purana, it will be presented as Puranic tradition. Any available epigraphic or other independent evidence for its historicity will be examined separately.

7. Consolidated Conclusion of This Chapter

The Puranic tradition of Ayodhya appears to have developed at several levels.

The first – the dynastic level: the connection with the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasties.

The second – the narrative level: Ayodhya as the land of Shri Ram's life and his birthplace.

The third – the Vaishnav religious level: the tradition regarding Shri Ram as an incarnation of Vishnu.

The fourth – the pilgrimage level: a sacred territory furnished with the Sarayu, ghats, ponds, temples, and numerous pilgrimage sites.

The fifth – the liberation and religious level: the tradition of the Saptapuri and the liberation-bestowing city.

Together, all these levels developed that cultural identity of Ayodhya which remains of such great importance in Indian civilization today.

Final Research Note

The most important research principle to emerge from this chapter is this – that the Puranas should neither be treated, without examination, as modern history, nor should their historical-cultural importance be entirely denied.

The Puranas are important sources of the memory, religious belief, dynastic tradition, and pilgrimage culture of Indian society. The historicity of their accounts should be examined together with

textual criticism, comparative literature, inscriptions, archaeology, and other independent evidence.

It is through precisely this balanced perspective that the history of Ayodhya can emerge in a more reliable and well-researched form.

Chapter 4: Principal Reference List

1. Maharshi Valmiki – The Valmiki Ramayana.

2. Vishnu Purana – chapters relating to the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku dynasty.

3. Vayu Purana – chapters relating to dynasty and the Solar dynasty.

4. Brahmanda Purana – material relating to dynasty.

5. Padma Purana – material relating to pilgrimage-glorification and the Vaishnav tradition.

6. Skanda Purana – Vaishnav-khanda, Ayodhya-Mahatmya.

7. Garuda Purana – material relating to pilgrimage and religious tradition.

8. Agni Purana – material relating to the Ram narrative.

9. Goswami Tulsidas – Ramcharitmanas.

10. The great poet Kalidasa – Raghuvamsha.

11. Archaeological Survey of India – archaeological reports and publications relating to Ayodhya.

12. Supreme Court of India – M. Siddiq (D) Thr. Lrs. v. Mahant Suresh Das & Ors., 9 November 2019.

13. Modern research papers, monographs, and university studies published on the history, archaeology, pilgrimage tradition, and the Ram narrative of Ayodhya.

CHAPTER 5

The History of the Ikshvaku Dynasty and the Solar Dynasty

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Part 1: The Concept of the Solar Dynasty, Vaivasvata Manu, and Ikshvaku

Indian ancient tradition mentions many royal dynasties. Among these, the tradition of the Solar dynasty (Suryavansha, or Adityavansha) and the Lunar dynasty (Chandravansha) is particularly renowned. In the context of the history of Ayodhya, the study of the Solar dynasty becomes extremely important, for Puranic and Ram-narrative tradition regards Shri Ram as the principal link of precisely this royal lineage.

The purpose of this chapter is not merely to present the traditional genealogy, but also to examine how various ancient texts present the Solar dynasty, and from what perspective modern historians view these genealogies.

1. The Meaning of the Name 'Solar Dynasty'

In Indian tradition, the term 'Solar dynasty' (Suryavansha) is used for that royal lineage whose ancestry is traced to the Sun, or to Vivasvan.

Puranic tradition mentions Vaivasvata Manu as the son of the Sun, and from Manu's son Ikshvaku, this dynastic tradition is carried forward, becoming later renowned by the names of the Ikshvaku dynasty and the Solar dynasty.

Here 'vansha' (dynasty/lineage) should not be understood only in the modern biological sense. In ancient Indian dynastic literature, 'vansha' is also connected with political, religious, and cultural succession.

2. Vaivasvata Manu

The place of Manu in the Puranas and in Vedic tradition is of great importance. In many traditions, the Manu of the present Manvantara is called Vaivasvata Manu.

The name 'Vaivasvata' is connected with Vivasvan, that is, the Sun.

According to Puranic tradition, the traditions of many royal dynasties proceed forward from Vaivasvata Manu. Among them, Ikshvaku holds a particular place.

The tradition connected with Manu is not confined to dynastic history alone. Manu is also connected with dharma, social order, and the ancient memory of the human community.

For this reason, the study of Manu is also important for the religious and social history of Indian civilization.

3. An Introduction to Ikshvaku

Ikshvaku is regarded as the principal founding king of the Solar dynasty.

Material relating to Ikshvaku is found in various Puranas, and he is described as the son of Vaivasvata Manu.

The name of Ikshvaku is particularly connected with Ayodhya because Indian tradition regards the sovereignty of Ayodhya as bound up with the Ikshvaku dynasty.

Later, many celebrated kings, and ultimately the birth of Shri Ram, are described within this very dynasty.

4. Ikshvaku and Ayodhya

Ikshvaku's place is central to the study of the history of Ayodhya.

In the Ramayana and Puranic traditions, Ayodhya is viewed as the capital of the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty.

However, establishing the definite date of Ikshvaku's personal reign on the basis of modern archaeological evidence is a separate question. In this treatise, therefore, we shall first understand Ikshvaku within the Puranic and Ram-narrative dynastic tradition.

Later, on the basis of available independent evidence, we shall undertake a historical review of this tradition.

5. The Sun and Manu in Vedic Literature

The roots of the traditions relating to the Sun, Vivasvan, and Manu are not confined to the Puranas alone.

Vedic literature contains mentions of Vivasvan and Manu. In the Rigveda, Manu's name occurs in the context of ancient religious tradition.

In the Bhagavad Gita, too, Shri Krishna states that he first taught this yoga to Vivasvan; Vivasvan taught it to Manu; and Manu taught it to Ikshvaku.

This reference is particularly important because it clearly presents the tradition of Vivasvan → Manu → Ikshvaku.

But since this mention in the Gita occurs in a religious-philosophical context, it would not be proper to treat it directly as historical evidence of any modern chronology.

6. The Ikshvaku Tradition in the Ramayana

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Shri Ram is placed within the tradition of the Ikshvaku dynasty.

In introducing Dasharatha's dynasty and Shri Ram, the memory of Ikshvaku and the ancestral kings is invoked.

This makes clear that, in the construction of the Ram narrative, the character of Shri Ram is presented not merely as an

individual hero, but also as the continuity of an ancient royal dynasty.

7. Genealogy in the Puranas

Genealogical lists relating to the Solar dynasty are found in the Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Bhagavata Purana, and other Puranic traditions.

Many of the names in these are the same, but not all the lists are entirely identical.

In one place a king's name appears in a different order; in another, the number of generations differs; and in another, additional names are found.

This variation is important for our research. It shows that the dynastic tradition was preserved and developed over a long period through oral and written traditions.

8. The Limits of Treating Genealogy as History

It is necessary here to establish a fundamental research principle.

If the name of a king is found in a Purana, this is evidence of that king's memory within Puranic tradition.

But this does not, by itself, establish in which definite year his reign fell.

To determine a king's historical date, a comparative study is necessary wherever inscriptions, coins, contemporary literature, or other independent evidence is available.

In this book, therefore, we shall neither accept genealogy without question, nor reject it without evidence.

9. From Ikshvaku to Shri Ram

After Ikshvaku, many kings follow in the tradition of the Solar dynasty. Among them, names such as Sagara, Bhagiratha, Dilipa, Raghu, Aja, and Dasharatha are particularly celebrated.

Ultimately, it is within this very tradition that Shri Ram's place is found.

Because of Shri Ram, this dynasty attains extraordinary prestige within Indian religious and cultural memory.

In later literature, Shri Ram's lineage is viewed in both the contexts of 'Raghuvamsha' and 'Suryavansha'.

10. The Solar Dynasty and the Raghu Dynasty

The terms 'Suryavansha' and 'Raghuvamsha' are often used in connected senses, but the background of their usage differs.

Suryavansha is the name of the broader dynastic tradition, while Raghuvamsha specifically denotes the literary tradition connected with King Raghu and his descendants.

Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha is the celebrated literary example of this tradition.

It is therefore useful, in understanding Shri Ram, to keep both traditions together in view.

11. Tradition and History: Respecting Both

The Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty is an extremely important part of Indian religious and cultural tradition.

Our purpose in this research treatise is not merely to diminish this tradition by the standard of modern history. At the same time, it would not be proper to declare every dynastic name found in religious tradition to be a definite historical fact without independent evidence.

For this reason, the nature of the available sources will be made clear for each important king going forward.

12. The Further Direction of Research

In the Parts that follow, we shall study, in turn, the kings succeeding Ikshvaku – Sagara, Bhagiratha, Dilipa, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, Shri Ram, Kusha and Lava, and the later Solar dynasty tradition.

At the same time, the genealogies of different Puranas will also be compared.

Where the tradition regarding a king is strong but independent historical evidence is limited, this will be clearly stated.

Conclusion of Part 1

In Indian tradition, the beginning of the Solar dynasty is traced from the Sun/Vivasvan to Vaivasvata Manu and then to Ikshvaku. From Ikshvaku onward, the dynastic tradition of Ayodhya develops, and it is within this long tradition that Shri Ram's place is found.

Vivasvan → Vaivasvata Manu → Ikshvaku → the Solar dynasty royal tradition → Shri Ram.

This sequence is of great importance within Indian religious and literary tradition.

But from a research standpoint, the historical date of each stage of this dynastic sequence should be examined on the basis of separate evidence.

In Part 2 of Chapter 5, we shall study the principal dynastic tradition following Ikshvaku – particularly the narrative extending to Sagara, his lineage, and Bhagiratha.

Part 2: From Ikshvaku to Sagara and Bhagiratha

After Ikshvaku, many kings are mentioned in the tradition of the Solar dynasty. Material relating to these kings is preserved chiefly in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, various Puranas, and later Sanskrit literature. Among them, Sagara and Bhagiratha are of particular importance, for the tradition connected with them is not confined to dynastic history alone, but becomes extremely influential in Indian religious and cultural memory as well.

The purpose of this Part is to set out these traditions systematically, while also making clear from what kind of source each detail is drawn.

1. The Royal Tradition after Ikshvaku

The names of many kings are found, in Puranic genealogies, after Ikshvaku. The order of these names is not entirely identical across different Puranas.

This difference is important from a research standpoint. It means that the tradition of the Solar dynasty was preserved in many textual traditions, and its details developed differently, over time, in different texts.

In this chapter, therefore, rather than presenting any single genealogy as final, the principal sources will be compared.

2. The Kakutstha Tradition

The name Kakutstha occurs importantly in the tradition of the Solar dynasty. In the later Ram-narrative tradition, Shri Ram's lineage is sometimes also addressed by the name Kakutstha.

This shows that, in ancient dynasties, there was also a tradition of addressing the entire royal lineage by the name of some celebrated ancestor.

In the same way, the name 'Raghuvamsha' later became renowned because of Raghu.

3. The Place of King Sagara

Maharaja Sagara holds an extremely important place in the tradition of the Solar dynasty.

An extensive narrative relating to Sagara is found in the Ramayana and the Puranas. The tradition connected with his name links the dynastic history of Ayodhya with religious narrative.

In the narrative of Sagara, his sons, the sage Kapila, and the subsequent tradition of the descent of the Ganga upon the earth are prominent.

4. Sagara's Sons

According to Puranic and Ramayana tradition, King Sagara had many sons. Their number is traditionally given as sixty thousand.

The narrative connected with his sons involves the search for a sacrificial horse, the hermitage of the sage Kapila, and the episode of their being reduced to ashes.

It must be made clear here that the mention of 'sixty thousand' is part of religious narrative. It should not be presented as a modern census figure or historical number.

5. The Episode of the Sage Kapila

The sage Kapila holds an important place in the narrative relating to Sagara's sons.

According to the narrative, Sagara's sons reached the place where the sage Kapila was engaged in austerities. Because of their conduct, they were reduced to ashes by the sage's fiery power.

After this event, the question of their deliverance arises.

It is from this point that the narrative of the Sagara lineage proceeds onward, becoming connected with Bhagiratha and the descent of the Ganga.

6. Anshuman

The name Anshuman is important in the lineage of Sagara.

According to the narrative, Anshuman attempted to bring about the deliverance of his ancestors. He was told that their deliverance

would be possible only through the Ganga's descent upon the earth.

Anshuman could not fulfil this purpose, but his effort established a tradition of religious duty for the generations that followed.

7. Dilipa

After Anshuman, the mention of Dilipa is found.

In Puranic and Ram-narrative tradition, Dilipa, too, made an effort with the purpose of bringing the Ganga to earth, but this task was not completed within his lifetime.

This responsibility then falls to his son, Bhagiratha.

8. Bhagiratha's Austerity

Among the most celebrated narratives of the Solar dynasty is the austerity (tapasya) of Bhagiratha.

Bhagiratha resolved to bring the Ganga to earth for the deliverance of his ancestors. For this, he undertook severe austerities.

Pleased by his austerities, the Ganga agreed to descend to earth, but the intervention of Lord Shiva was necessary to bear her force.

9. Lord Shiva and the Ganga

According to Puranic narrative, Lord Shiva bore, in his matted locks, the immense force generated by the Ganga's descent upon the earth.

Thereafter, the Ganga flowed upon the earth.

This narrative carries extremely deep religious and cultural meaning within Indian culture.

The memory of Bhagiratha's austerity and the descent of the Ganga remains present in Indian religious life even today.

10. The Tradition of the Name 'Bhagirathi'

One name of the Ganga, Bhagirathi, is connected with Bhagiratha.

This name became a cultural memorial to the fact that Bhagiratha strove to bring the Ganga to earth for the deliverance of his ancestors.

Even today, in Indian language and culture, the phrase 'Bhagirath effort' (Bhagirath prayas) is used to describe the completion of an extremely difficult task.

This is an example of the long-enduring cultural influence of this narrative upon Indian society.

11. The Religious Importance of the Sagara-Bhagiratha Tradition

Several important religious values are visible in the narrative from Sagara to Bhagiratha – duty toward one's ancestors, austerity, resolve, sacrifice, adherence to dharma, public welfare, and responsibility carried across generations.

This narrative, therefore, did not remain merely a dynastic tale. It became part of Indian moral and religious culture.

12. Sagara and Bhagiratha from a Historical Standpoint

Sagara and Bhagiratha are mentioned in many ancient Indian literary sources. This allows the antiquity and cultural importance of their tradition to be studied.

But establishing the definite historical date of their reigns, on the basis of currently available evidence, is a separate question.

This treatise, therefore, presents Sagara and Bhagiratha as principal figures of Puranic and Ram-narrative dynastic tradition.

Wherever independent historical evidence is available, it will be recorded separately.

13. The Importance of Genealogy

The narrative of Sagara and Bhagiratha shows that ancient Indian dynastic tradition was not merely a list of the transfer of power from king to king.

It also incorporated the memory of ancestors, religious duty, austerity, and social ideals.

From this standpoint, the genealogy of the Solar dynasty is also a tradition of cultural memory.

14. The Connection with Ayodhya

The tradition of Sagara and Bhagiratha belongs to the Solar dynasty, and the memory of Ayodhya as the capital of the Solar dynasty connects this dynastic tradition with Ayodhya.

The history of Ayodhya is therefore not merely a narrative beginning with Shri Ram. The Solar-dynasty memory preceding the Ram narrative is also an important part of the cultural identity of Ayodhya.

For this reason, the study, in the Parts that follow, of the principal Solar-dynasty kings before Shri Ram is necessary.

15. The Necessity of Comparing Sources

The narrative relating to Sagara and Bhagiratha is found in different forms in the Valmiki Ramayana, various Puranas, and other Sanskrit literature.

Wherever differences exist in the narrative, the researcher should not treat any single form as universal without comment.

In this book, going forward, the following method will be used in such situations – what does Source A say → what does Source B say → what is the difference → what does modern research say.

Conclusion of Part 2

After Ikshvaku, many kings are mentioned in the Solar dynasty tradition. Among them, Sagara, Anshuman, Dilipa, and Bhagiratha hold particular importance.

The narrative of Sagara's sons, the efforts of Anshuman and Dilipa, and the tradition of the descent of the Ganga connected with Bhagiratha's austerity are among the most influential religious-cultural memories of Indian civilization.

This narrative also connects the dynastic tradition of Ayodhya with the religious tradition of the Ganga.

From a research standpoint, the importance of these narratives lies at two levels – first, as a source of ancient Indian religious and cultural memory; second, as a source for the study of the Solar dynasty tradition.

Independent archaeological and epigraphic evidence would be required to establish the historical dates and events of these narratives.

In Part 3, carrying forward the Solar-dynasty tradition after Sagara-Bhagiratha, we shall study the dynastic tradition extending to Dilipa, Raghu, Aja, and Dasharatha.

Part 3: The Tradition from Bhagiratha through Dilipa, Raghu, and Aja to Dasharatha

The Solar dynasty tradition does not end with Bhagiratha; it continues forward through many kings in various Puranas and in Ram-narrative literature. The most important stage of this dynastic tradition is that in which kings such as Raghu, Aja, and Dasharatha follow, and in which, ultimately, the birth of Shri Ram is described.

In this Part, we shall pay particular attention to those kings through whom the dynastic memory from Bhagiratha to Dasharatha can be understood.

1. The Dynastic Tradition after Bhagiratha

Bhagiratha's place in the Solar dynasty tradition is extremely important. After him, genealogical lists of many kings are found in various Puranas.

Not all the names and order in these lists are identical. It would not, therefore, be proper to treat the genealogy of any single text as the final and undisputed order of the entire Solar dynasty.

Our purpose here is to understand those principal names that recur repeatedly across different traditions.

2. The Tradition of Nabhaga and Ambarisha

Names such as Nabhaga and Ambarisha are also found in the Solar dynasty tradition.

The narrative of Ambarisha, in particular, is celebrated in Vaishnav religious tradition. In the Bhagavata Purana, Ambarisha is presented as a great devotee of Lord Vishnu.

The narrative connected with him, involving the sage Durvasa and the Sudarshana Chakra, underscores the importance of devotion and dharma.

It should be kept in mind here that the purpose of all the narratives relating to Ambarisha was not to write royal history. A large part of their purpose was also to present religious and moral ideals.

3. The Nabhaga Tradition and Textual Variants

Material relating to the name Nabhaga is found in different contexts in various texts. In some traditions, Nabhaga is placed as a king of the Solar dynasty, while in other narratives, a different episode connected with this same name appears.

It would not, therefore, be proper to treat identical names, without examination of the source, as the same historical person.

This example shows that, in studying ancient genealogies, it is necessary to distinguish between similarity of name and identity of person.

4. The Royal Tradition Further Onward

Puranic genealogies mention several generations after Bhagiratha. Some of these names are found in different forms in different sources.

When modern researchers study these genealogies, they generally pay attention to three matters – which names are found in many independent texts? For which king is there any additional literary or epigraphic evidence? Does the order of the genealogy remain the same across different sources?

These questions can make the study of the dynastic tradition more scientific.

5. King Dilipa

The name Dilipa holds particular importance in the Solar dynasty. However, differences appear, across different texts, in Dilipa's standing and in the narratives connected with him.

In Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha, an extremely beautiful and detailed literary portrayal of Dilipa is found.

In the opening cantos of the Raghuvamsha, the narrative of King Dilipa, his wife Sudakshina, and the cow Nandini appears.

This narrative presents the ideal of a king's dharma, service, and humility.

6. The Narrative of Dilipa and Nandini

According to Kalidasa, King Dilipa had committed some kind of religious lapse, and, to atone for it, he had to serve the sage Vashishtha's divine cow Nandini.

The king served her with the utmost devotion.

In one episode, when a lion attacks Nandini, Dilipa offers his own life to protect her.

This narrative is employed to portray the king's ideal character.

It should be kept in mind here that this account is the literary narrative of Kalidasa's epic. It would be proper, from a research standpoint, to present it precisely as such.

7. The Rise of Raghu

Raghu is mentioned as the son of Dilipa.

Raghu's name became so celebrated that, later, his lineage came to be called the Raghu dynasty (Raghuvamsha).

Shri Ram, too, is placed within this broad Raghu-dynasty tradition.

Thus, the literary tradition moving from 'Suryavansha' toward 'Raghuvamsha' represents an important development of Indian dynastic memory.

8. The Ideal of Raghu

In Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha, Raghu is portrayed as an ideal king.

Qualities such as valour, generosity, care for his subjects, devotion to dharma, and self-restraint are given prominence in his character.

Here, once again, the distinction between literature and history becomes important.

Kalidasa's purpose was not, in the modern sense, to write history. He presented the dynastic tradition through epic ideals.

The study of Raghu's character is therefore extremely important for literary and cultural history.

9. From Raghu to Aja

After Raghu, the name of Aja appears in the Solar dynasty tradition.

Aja is regarded as the father of Dasharatha and the grandfather of Shri Ram.

Aja is mentioned importantly in both the Valmiki Ramayana and Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha.

The narrative of Aja and Indumati is particularly celebrated in Sanskrit literature.

10. Aja and Indumati

Kalidasa presents, in the Raghuvamsha, the poignant narrative of King Aja and his wife Indumati.

The episode of Indumati's death is counted among the most sensitive passages of Sanskrit literature.

This narrative is not merely dynastic information; it also expresses human emotion, love, grief, and the uncertainty of life.

This shows that the narrative of the Solar dynasty was not merely one of war and royal power; family and human relationships also held an important place within it.

11. The Tradition Advancing Toward Dasharatha

After Aja, the place of his son Dasharatha follows.

Dasharatha is the central figure of that dynastic history of Ayodhya after which the narrative of Shri Ram begins.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Dasharatha is presented as a powerful king of Ayodhya.

During his reign, Ayodhya is described as a prosperous, well-organized city, important from a religious and social standpoint.

12. Dasharatha and Ayodhya

The description of Ayodhya in relation to Dasharatha holds particular importance.

The Ramayana provides a detailed literary portrayal of Ayodhya's roads, buildings, palaces, markets, gardens, and civic life.

This helps us understand how Ayodhya was presented as an ideal royal city in the tradition of the Ram narrative.

However, this literary description cannot be used directly as an archaeological map of the city; independent evidence would be required to connect any particular architectural detail described in the Ramayana with any specific site of present-day archaeological Ayodhya.

13. Dasharatha's Kingship

In Dasharatha's character, three roles appear – king, father, and upholder of dharma.

He loves his son Shri Ram deeply, but because of an old promise given to Kaikeyi, he must face an extremely difficult decision.

Ram's exile arises from precisely this political and family crisis.

This episode later became established, in Indian literature, as a great example of keeping one's word and adherence to dharma.

14. From Dasharatha to Shri Ram

Among Dasharatha's sons, Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughna are mentioned in the Ramayana tradition.

Among these, Shri Ram becomes the most celebrated figure of the Solar dynasty tradition.

Thus, the dynastic tradition beginning with Ikshvaku, passing through kings such as Sagara and Bhagiratha, reaches Raghu, Aja, and Dasharatha, and then attains its most influential religious and cultural form in the character of Shri Ram.

15. Caution in the Genealogy

It is necessary, once again, to reiterate an important research principle here.

Differences are found, across various Puranas and the Ramayana tradition, in the names and order of the Solar dynasty kings.

Therefore, going forward in this book, if any genealogy presents a sequence such as Bhagiratha → certain king → certain king → Dilipa → Raghu → Aja → Dasharatha → Ram, the relevant source will also be given alongside it.

We shall not present any conjectural sequence as an established historical chronology.

16. The Cultural Influence of the Tradition

This long tradition of the Solar dynasty influenced the concept of ideal rajadharma within Indian society.

The tradition appears connected with sacrifice and dynastic duty through Sagara, with austerity and resolve through Bhagiratha, with generosity through Raghu, with human sensitivity through Aja, and with the keeping of one's word through Dasharatha.

The supreme cultural form of these ideals is seen, further on, in the character of Shri Ram.

Conclusion of Part 3

After Bhagiratha, the Solar dynasty tradition proceeds forward through various kings. Many names and textual variants are found in the available Puranic and literary sources, but the tradition of Dilipa, Raghu, Aja, and Dasharatha holds particular importance in the dynastic narrative reaching Shri Ram.

Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha gave this tradition a great literary form, while the Valmiki Ramayana made the narrative of Dasharatha and Shri Ram the central part of Indian cultural memory.

Thus, the broad tradition of Ikshvaku → Sagara → Bhagiratha → Raghu → Aja → Dasharatha → Shri Ram forms an important baseline for understanding the dynastic memory of Ayodhya, although the historicity of each intermediate stage requires examination from independent sources.

In Part 4, we shall proceed from Maharaja Dasharatha to the birth of Lord Shri Ram and his dynastic introduction, and shall

undertake a comparative review of the accounts found in the Ramayana and the Puranas.

Part 4: From Maharaja Dasharatha to Lord Shri Ram – Dynasty, Birth, and Succession

Within the long tradition of the Solar dynasty, the place of Maharaja Dasharatha and his son Lord Shri Ram is of the utmost importance. The dynastic memory that had continued through many generations, beginning with Ikshvaku, becomes, in the episode of Dasharatha and Shri Ram, the central subject of Indian religious, literary, and cultural tradition.

In this Part, our principal basis will be the Valmiki Ramayana and Puranic tradition. At the same time, the caution will be maintained that religious narrative, literary description, and historical evidence not be placed within a single category.

1. Maharaja Dasharatha: A King of the Ikshvaku Tradition

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Dasharatha is described as the king of Ayodhya and the principal ruler of the Ikshvaku dynasty.

His reign represents that royal tradition of Ayodhya which appears at its zenith at the beginning of the Ram narrative.

Dasharatha is not merely a king. He is also presented as a father, a husband, a warrior, and a ruler bound by his word.

Through his character, the Ramayana presents, in an extremely powerful manner, the conflict between the duty of kingship and personal emotion.

2. Dasharatha's Ayodhya

The Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana contains a detailed description of Ayodhya.

A literary description is found of the city possessing highways, buildings, markets, gardens, water facilities, and religious institutions.

Ayodhya is presented as a prosperous and well-organized capital.

This description is an important literary source for the study of ancient Indian urban imagination and royal life.

But from a research standpoint, this caution is necessary: independent evidence would be required to connect each architectural detail described in the Ramayana directly with any particular site of present-day archaeological Ayodhya.

3. Dasharatha's Family Tradition

The Ramayana mentions Dasharatha's three principal queens — Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra.

From them, the birth of his four sons is described — Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughna.

The character and mutual relationships of these four brothers form the central structure of the Ram narrative.

4. The Putrakameshti Yajna

The episode relating to Dasharatha's concern over the lack of an heir, prior to the birth of Shri Ram, is described in the Bala Kanda.

According to the narrative of the Ramayana, Dasharatha had a yajna performed for the sake of obtaining offspring. This episode is known in tradition as the Putrakameshti Yajna.

Dasharatha distributed the divine payasam obtained after the yajna among his queens, and the narrative of the birth of the four sons follows thereafter.

This episode is of great importance in religious tradition.

From a historical standpoint, it would be proper to present it as the religious narrative of the Ramayana; it cannot be declared a proven biological or historical event in the modern sense.

5. The Birth of Lord Shri Ram

According to Ramayana tradition, Shri Ram was born as the son of Kausalya.

Bharat's birth is described as being from Kaikeyi, and that of Lakshman and Shatrughna from Sumitra.

Shri Ram was later regarded, in Indian Vaishnav tradition, as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

It is from this point that the religious importance of the dynastic tradition of Ayodhya increases enormously.

6. Shri Ram's Dynastic Introduction

In the Ramayana, Shri Ram is presented not merely as the son of Dasharatha, but as the successor of the Ikshvaku dynasty.

He is connected with the Raghu-dynasty tradition and develops as the ideal prince who observes the duty of kingship.

Thus, both dynastic and religious dimensions appear together in the personality of Shri Ram.

7. Ram and Vishwamitra

The next important stage of Shri Ram's life is his departure with the sage Vishwamitra.

Vishwamitra requests Dasharatha to allow Ram and Lakshman to accompany him, so that they may protect his yajna.

Dasharatha is initially anxious, but after being reassured by the preceptor Vashishtha, Ram and Lakshman go with Vishwamitra.

This episode marks an important stage in Shri Ram's journey from prince to protector of dharma.

8. Tadaka and Other Episodes

After Shri Ram and Lakshman set out with Vishwamitra, episodes such as the slaying of Tadaka and the protection of the yajna follow.

Thereafter, they reach Mithila.

Here begins an extremely important chapter of the Ram narrative – the Swayamvara of Sita.

9. Shri Ram and Sita

In Mithila, the episode of the Swayamvara of Sita, the daughter of King Janaka, takes place.

After the episode of Ram lifting Shiva's bow and stringing it, his marriage to Sita follows.

This marriage connects the Ikshvaku dynasty of Ayodhya with the royal tradition of Mithila.

Ram and Sita become, in Indian culture, symbols of ideal marriage, dharma, and propriety.

10. Ram's Appointment as Heir Apparent

In the Ayodhya Kanda, Dasharatha's decision to make Shri Ram the heir apparent (yuvaraja) is an important political episode.

Preparations begin, in Ayodhya, for Ram's coronation.

Ram's popularity and his virtues are described in this very context.

But circumstances change just before the coronation.

11. Kaikeyi's Boons

Kaikeyi is reminded of the two boons granted to her earlier by Dasharatha.

She demands the kingdom for Bharat and fourteen years of exile for Ram.

Dasharatha is thrown into deep sorrow by this demand.

Ram accepts the circumstances, and decides to go to the forest in order to uphold his father's word.

12. Ram's Departure for the Forest

Sita and Lakshman, too, decide to go to the forest along with Ram.

This episode is the central part of the fundamental moral structure of the Ramayana.

Ram renounces the kingdom, royal comforts, and his rights in order to uphold his father's word.

It is from this point that the cultural standing of Shri Ram as 'Maryada Purushottam' (the ideal man of propriety) is further strengthened.

13. The Death of Dasharatha

After Ram's departure for the forest, Dasharatha becomes extremely sorrowful.

In separation from Ram, he passes away.

When Bharat returns to Ayodhya and learns of the circumstances, he sets out toward the forest in order to bring Ram back.

14. Bharat and Ram

Bharat requests Ram to take back the kingdom.

Ram, regarding his father's word as supreme, declines to return to Ayodhya immediately.

Bharat returns to Ayodhya carrying Ram's sandals, installs them upon the throne, and himself governs the kingdom as Ram's representative — this is an extremely celebrated tradition of the Ramayana.

This episode became, in Indian literature, a great example of brotherly love, sacrifice, and the duty of kingship.

15. A New Meaning of the Dynastic Tradition

By the time we reach the narrative of Dasharatha and Ram, the dynastic tradition of the Solar dynasty ceases to be merely a list of kings.

Within it, lineage → kingdom → dharma → word → sacrifice → ideal governance become interconnected.

This is why the character of Shri Ram became established in Indian civilization not merely as a historical or literary figure, but as a broad religious and moral ideal.

16. Comparative Study of the Ramayana and the Puranas

Many similarities are found between the Ramayana and the Puranas regarding the birth of Ram and the Solar dynasty tradition, but not all the details are identical.

In some Puranas, the genealogy is more detailed. In one place the religious tone is more prominent, and in another, greater attention is given to the dynastic order.

It would therefore be appropriate for research to undertake a comparative study of the material of the Valmiki Ramayana → Vishnu Purana → Vayu Purana → Bhagavata Purana → other Puranic sources.

Conclusion of Part 4

In the tradition of Maharaja Dasharatha, the Solar dynasty appears at its most celebrated stage. Dasharatha's son Shri Ram was regarded as the successor of the Ikshvaku-Solar dynasty and, within Indian Vaishnav tradition, as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Ram's birth, his departure with Vishwamitra, his marriage to Sita, the preparations for his appointment as heir apparent, and his departure for the forest to uphold his father's word – all of these episodes give religious and moral meaning to the dynastic memory of Ayodhya.

Thus, the dynastic tradition beginning with Ikshvaku takes, in Shri Ram, the form of a cultural ideal whose influence upon Indian civilization has been extremely far-reaching.

In Part 5, we shall view the events from Shri Ram's exile through the victory at Lanka to his return to Ayodhya, within the context of the history of the Solar dynasty and Ayodhya.

Part 5: Shri Ram's Exile, the Victory at Lanka, and the Return to Ayodhya

The period of Shri Ram's exile is the most extensive and influential part of the narrative of the Ramayana. During this period, the life of Ram, the prince of Ayodhya, moves from the royal palace to the forest, the hermitages of sages, tribal society, Kishkindha, and Lanka. It is in this very journey that those qualities of Ram's character emerge which Indian tradition has come to regard as the ideal of dharma, sacrifice, propriety, and duty.

The principal literary basis of this Part is the Valmiki Ramayana. In later Puranas and Ram-narrative traditions, these events also developed many religious and regional forms.

1. From Ayodhya Toward the Forest

In place of the coronation, Shri Ram had to accept fourteen years of exile.

Ram regarded the upholding of his father Dasharatha's word as his dharma. Sita and Lakshman, too, prepared to go to the forest with him.

This event is a decisive turning point in the dynastic history of Ayodhya. On the one hand lies the question of royal power and

succession; on the other, the question of family dharma and the keeping of one's word.

Ram's decision became, in later Indian tradition, the ideal of sacrifice and propriety.

2. The Grief of the Citizens of Ayodhya

The love of the citizens of Ayodhya for Ram, at the time of his departure for the forest, is described in particular detail in the Ramayana.

The city's residents attempt to go with Ram. This description shows that, in the tradition of the Ramayana, Ram is presented not merely as a member of the royal family, but as a prince beloved of his subjects.

Here, too, the social aspect of Ayodhya comes to the fore.

3. Nishadaraja Guha

In the early stage of the exile, Ram meets Nishadaraja Guha.

Guha holds deep reverence for Ram and assists him.

This episode is important for understanding the social dimension of the Ram narrative. It provides a literary picture of the relationship between the royal family and the forest-dwelling/Nishada society.

It would be more proper to understand this within the Ramayana's own context, rather than imposing modern social classifications upon it directly.

4. Chitrakuta

Ram, Sita, and Lakshman reach Chitrakuta.

Chitrakuta acquires an extremely important place in the tradition of the Ram narrative. Here, Ram's forest life becomes settled in its initial form.

Bharat, too, reaches Chitrakuta with the purpose of bringing Ram back.

5. Bharat's Entreaty

Bharat entreats Ram to return to Ayodhya.

Regarding his father's word as supreme, Ram does not change his decision.

Bharat returns, carrying Ram's sandals, and installs them upon the throne of Ayodhya.

This episode connects dynastic succession with a unique moral dimension.

6. The Journey to Dandakaranya

After Chitrakuta, Ram travels through various regions of the forest.

The Ramayana describes many sages and hermitages. Ram accepts the responsibility of protecting the sages living in the forest.

The episodes relating to Dandakaranya describe the forest, hermitages, and various communities.

Here, the geography of the Ram narrative extends far beyond Ayodhya.

7. Panchavati

Ram, Sita, and Lakshman dwell at Panchavati.

It is from here that the events of the Ram narrative change decisively.

The episode of Shurpanakha, the battle with Khara and Dushana, and, later, the abduction of Sita are all connected with this very region.

8. The Abduction of Sita

According to the Ramayana, Ravana deceitfully abducted Sita and took her to Lanka.

This event carries Shri Ram's exile into a new phase.

Ram and Lakshman set out in search of Sita.

During this search, they encounter many important characters.

9. Jatayu

While protecting Sita, Jatayu battles Ravana.

Grievously wounded, he informs Ram of Sita's abduction.

The episode of Jatayu became a symbol of sacrifice and duty.

Ram's regard for Jatayu is an important example of compassion and honour within the Indian tradition of devotion to Ram.

10. Shabari

During the search for Sita, Ram meets Shabari.

In the later devotional traditions of the Ramayana, Shabari's character became extremely popular.

Her devotion was regarded as an example of unfeigned love and surrender to God.

Here, too, differences appear in the details of the narrative across different traditions of the Ram narrative, which may be recorded in a further comparative study.

11. Kishkindha and Sugriva

Ram meets Sugriva.

Sugriva receives Ram's assistance in his conflict with his brother Vali.

In return, Sugriva promises Ram his assistance in the search for Sita.

It is from this point that the vanara alliance and a broad allied power enter the Ram narrative.

12. The Importance of Hanuman

In Kishkindha, Ram meets Hanuman.

Hanuman later becomes one of the most important characters of the Ram narrative.

His wisdom, strength, courage, and devotion were given ideal form in Indian religious tradition.

Hanuman's role becomes decisive in the search for Sita and in reaching Lanka.

13. Toward Lanka

Hanuman crosses the ocean and reaches Lanka.

There, he finds Sita in the Ashoka Vatika and delivers Shri Ram's message.

The narrative of his activities in Lanka and his return follows thereafter.

This episode is the central part of the Sundara Kanda of the Ramayana.

14. The Ocean and the Bridge

For Sita's deliverance, Ram's army reaches the shore of the ocean.

The Ramayana describes the construction of a bridge (setu) to cross the ocean and reach Lanka.

In Indian tradition, this site later became renowned by the name of Ram Setu.

The religious, literary, and geographical aspects of this episode should be studied scientifically on the basis of separate sources.

15. The War at Lanka

The war between Ram and Ravana is the climactic point of the narrative of the Ramayana.

The war describes many warriors on both sides.

Ultimately, Shri Ram slays Ravana and secures Sita's freedom.

In religious tradition, this event was established as the victory of dharma over adharma.

16. Vibhishana and Lanka

Ravana's brother Vibhishana sides with Ram.

After Ravana's death, Ram makes Vibhishana the king of Lanka.

This episode reveals Ram's approach to rajadharma and to the order of power after victory.

Ram himself does not bring the kingdom of Lanka under his own rule.

17. The Return Toward Ayodhya

After the fourteen years of exile are completed, Ram returns to Ayodhya.

Sita and Lakshman return with Ram.

Bharat is waiting for him.

Ram's return to Ayodhya is connected, in Indian tradition, with the festival of Diwali. However, the historical development of this connection, and its various regional traditions, should be studied separately.

18. Shri Ram's Coronation

After returning to Ayodhya, Ram's coronation takes place.

The concept of Ram Rajya became, in Indian cultural tradition, a symbol of ideal governance.

Ideals such as justice, public welfare, dharma, truth, security, and good governance became connected with Ram Rajya.

19. The Solar Dynasty and Ram Rajya

Ram's coronation is an important milestone of the Solar dynasty tradition.

The dynastic memory flowing from Ikshvaku now attains, in Shri Ram's ideal reign, its most celebrated form.

For this reason, the term 'Ram Rajya' has long been used, in Indian political and religious thought, for the vision of ideal governance.

20. History and the Ram Narrative

An important research caution is once again necessary here.

The narrative of the exile, Kishkindha, the war at Lanka, and Ram Rajya is an extremely ancient and influential cultural memory of Indian civilization.

But scholars hold differing views concerning the modern historical date, route, and archaeological identification of these events.

In this treatise, therefore, wherever the description is that of the Ramayana, it will be presented as Ramayana tradition, and wherever independent archaeological or epigraphic evidence is available, it will be set out separately.

Conclusion of Part 5

Shri Ram's exile connects the dynastic narrative of Ayodhya with the whole of the Indian geography. The Ram narrative, extending

from Ayodhya to Chitrakuta, Dandakaranya, Panchavati, Kishkindha, and Lanka, gave broad shape to India's religious and cultural memory.

Ram's departure for the forest became connected with the keeping of one's word; his relationship with Sugriva and Hanuman, with cooperation and friendship; the search for Sita, with duty; the victory over Ravana, with the victory of dharma; and the return to Ayodhya, with the concept of ideal governance.

Thus, in the life of Shri Ram, the dynastic tradition of the Solar dynasty does not remain merely the story of lineage and power; it becomes the foundation of the broad Indian cultural tradition of dharma, propriety, sacrifice, and public welfare.

In Part 6, we shall study Shri Ram's reign, the tradition of the Uttara Kanda, Lava and Kusha, and the Solar dynasty genealogy after Shri Ram.

Part 6: Shri Ram's Reign, Lava-Kusha, and the Solar Dynasty after Shri Ram

With Shri Ram's return to Ayodhya and his coronation, a new phase of the Ram narrative begins. In Indian tradition, this period is remembered by the name of Ram Rajya. Thereafter, the mention of Shri Ram's sons Lava and Kusha, and of the further dynastic tradition of Ayodhya, is found in various texts.

Particular care is necessary in this Part, because differences appear, in the accounts of Shri Ram's reign and the genealogy after him, across the Valmiki Ramayana, the Puranas, and later Ram-narrative traditions.

1. Shri Ram's Coronation

After the period of exile was completed, Shri Ram returned to Ayodhya and his coronation took place.

This occasion is extremely important in the tradition of the Ramayana. The kingdom which Bharat had governed under the representation of Ram's sandals was once again handed over to Shri Ram.

With Ram's accession, the sovereignty of Ayodhya is re-established within the Ikshvaku-Raghu dynasty tradition.

2. The Concept of Ram Rajya

In Indian cultural memory, Ram Rajya became a symbol of ideal governance.

Ram Rajya is generally associated with ideals such as justice, truth, public welfare, adherence to dharma, security, prosperity, and the responsible role of the king.

It should be kept in mind here that the detailed ideal portrayal of Ram Rajya is chiefly a subject of religious and literary tradition. It would not be proper to treat it as a direct historical description of a modern administrative system.

3. Shri Ram and His Subjects

Particular importance is given, in the Ram narrative, to the relationship between king and subjects.

The welfare of the subjects is regarded as more important than the king's personal happiness.

In the tradition of the Uttara Kanda, in connection with popular opinion, the episode arises of Ram taking an extremely difficult decision regarding Sita.

This episode is among the most discussed and sensitive episodes of Ram's character.

4. The Question of the Uttara Kanda

In the study of the Ramayana, the place of the Uttara Kanda is a subject of particular research.

Traditionally, the Uttara Kanda is regarded as the final book of the Valmiki Ramayana. It contains the prior history of Ravana, Ram Rajya, the abandonment of Sita, Lava-Kusha, and narratives relating to the final period of Shri Ram.

But in modern Ramayana studies, there is discussion and disagreement among scholars concerning the composition, textual tradition, and various layers of the Uttara Kanda.

In this book, therefore, when presenting the material of the Uttara Kanda, it will be clearly marked as belonging to the traditional textual tradition of the Ramayana.

5. Sita and the Hermitage of Valmiki

According to the tradition of the Uttara Kanda, Sita lives in the forest, at the hermitage of the sage Valmiki.

There, the birth and upbringing of her sons Lava and Kusha are described.

This episode once again connects the dynastic history of Ayodhya with the hermitage and forest tradition.

6. Lava and Kusha

Lava and Kusha are given a place, in Ramayana tradition, as the sons of Shri Ram and Sita.

They are extremely important not merely as princes, but also as the first singers of the Ram narrative.

According to tradition, the sage Valmiki imparted to them knowledge of the Ramayana, and they sang the narrative of Ram.

Thus, the narrative of Lava-Kusha becomes connected also with the very cultural tradition of the spread of the Ramayana.

7. The Ashvamedha Yajna

The narrative of the Uttara Kanda mentions Shri Ram's performance of the Ashvamedha Yajna.

A celebrated tradition is found in which Lava and Kusha sing the Ramayana during the yajna.

Ram himself hearing the narrative of his own life from the mouths of his sons – this is an extremely poignant and unique episode in Indian literature.

8. Lava-Kusha and Ayodhya

The connection of Lava and Kusha, in Ramayana tradition, was later linked to two important royal traditions.

In many later traditions, connections such as Lava → Lavapuri/Lahore and Kusha → Kushavati are found.

But before treating these geographical identification claims as settled history, independent archaeological and epigraphic evidence is required.

It would therefore be more proper, in this treatise, to present these as traditional beliefs.

9. The Genealogy after Shri Ram

The Puranas mention the genealogy of the Solar dynasty after Shri Ram.

The tradition of the lineage continuing forward from Ram's son Kusha is of particular importance.

The names of many kings after Kusha are found in various Puranas.

Some of these names appear the same across different texts, while in others, the order and details differ.

10. Onward from Kusha

Puranic tradition mentions kings such as Atithi after Kusha.

Further on, after many generations, this dynasty is described as connected with the royal tradition of Ayodhya.

But an important problem arises here – not all the Puranas present an identical list.

It would therefore be more scientific to place the genealogies of different sources in separate tables in an appendix to the book.

11. Textual Variants in the Genealogy

Textual variants are a common problem in the study of the genealogies of ancient dynasties.

The position of a king's name in one text may differ in another text.

Sometimes the same name appears in different generations, and sometimes a king's name is found in one genealogy but not in another.

We shall therefore, in this treatise, maintain the distinction between 'a single fixed genealogy' and 'source-based genealogies'.

12. The Continuity of the Solar Dynasty in the Puranas

The Vishnu Purana, the Bhagavata Purana, the Vayu Purana, and other Puranas contain accounts of the kings of the Solar dynasty following Ram.

The purpose of these texts was not, in the modern sense, to prepare royal records.

Even so, the dynastic memory preserved by them is important for the study of Indian history and culture.

They help us understand how Indian society remembered its ancient royal dynasties.

13. The Question of the Historicity of Shri Ram

Modern scholars hold different views regarding the historicity of Shri Ram.

Some scholars see elements of ancient historical memory within the Ram narrative, while others view it chiefly as religious-epic tradition.

The purpose of this book is not to declare any view to be final truth without evidence.

We shall present faith as faith, literature as literature, and archaeological evidence as evidence.

14. Ayodhya and the Solar Dynasty

Because of Shri Ram, the name of Ayodhya became permanently connected with the Solar dynasty tradition.

Ayodhya ceased to be merely a royal city; it became the principal centre of the religious memory of the Ram narrative.

In the ages that followed, devotion to Ram, Vaishnav traditions, and various saint-sects further strengthened this identity of Ayodhya.

15. The Tradition of Ayodhya after Shri Ram

The history of Ayodhya after Ram is not merely the story of a dynasty.

Over time, religious traditions, pilgrimage culture, temples, the tradition of saints, Vaishnav sects, literature, and folk narratives became connected with it.

In this way, the Solar-dynasty royal tradition appears gradually to have transformed into the broad cultural tradition of Ayodhya.

16. Historical Evidence and Its Limits

The independent epigraphic evidence currently available regarding the long genealogy of kings after Shri Ram is limited.

It would not, therefore, be proper to declare every name a historical king in the modern sense.

The importance of the genealogy is nonetheless not diminished.

It is an important source for understanding the historical-cultural memory of Indian society.

17. The Research Method of This Chapter

In this chapter, we have kept three levels distinct — first, religious tradition (the events described in the Ramayana and the Puranas); second, literary tradition (Kalidasa, later Ram-narratives, and literature in other Sanskrit and Indian languages); third, history and archaeology (inscriptions, archaeological material, coins, architecture, and other independent evidence).

A balanced study of Ayodhya and the Solar dynasty is possible only by bringing these three together.

Conclusion of Part 6

Shri Ram's coronation is among the most important stages of the Solar dynasty royal tradition. The concept of Ram Rajya profoundly influenced Indian political and moral thought.

In the tradition of the Uttara Kanda, the narrative of Lava-Kusha, Valmiki's hermitage, the Ashvamedha, and Shri Ram's final period is found. After Shri Ram, the genealogy of the Solar dynasty, extending onward from Kusha, was preserved in the Puranas, but textual variants are found in its order and names across different sources.

It is therefore more proper to present the genealogy after Shri Ram not as a proven modern chronology, but as an ancient dynastic tradition based on its sources.

In the next and final Part of the chapter, Part 7, we shall present a historical review of the Solar dynasty, a comparative study of the genealogies of various texts, its connection with Ayodhya, and the conclusions of this entire chapter. References will also be given in this same Part.

Part 7: A Historical Review of the Solar Dynasty, Comparison of Sources, and Overall Conclusion

The tradition of the Ikshvaku dynasty and the Solar dynasty is among the most ancient and influential dynastic memories of Indian civilization. Within this tradition, names such as Vaivasvata Manu, Ikshvaku, Sagara, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, and Shri Ram are particularly celebrated.

In the preceding six Parts, we have examined this tradition in sequence. It is now necessary to bring together the available literary, religious, and historical sources in order to understand what the real importance of the Solar dynasty tradition is within history, and what its limits are.

1. The Basic Tradition of the Solar Dynasty

In Indian tradition, the basic sequence of the Solar dynasty is generally traced as Vivasvan → Vaivasvata Manu → Ikshvaku.

Ikshvaku is regarded as the principal founding king of the royal tradition of Ayodhya.

Further on, many celebrated kings follow within this very dynasty, and ultimately, the birth of Dasharatha and Shri Ram is described.

This tradition is not merely dynastic. Dharma, kingship, social order, and cultural ideals are also connected with it.

2. The Tradition of the Principal Kings

Many kings are mentioned in the literature relating to the Solar dynasty. Among these, the names Ikshvaku, Sagara, Anshuman, Dilipa, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, and Shri Ram are extremely important.

The narrative of each of them developed within different religious and literary contexts.

3. Sagara and Bhagiratha

The tradition of Sagara and Bhagiratha connects the Solar dynasty with the religious tradition of the Ganga.

The narrative of Sagara's sons and Bhagiratha's austerity remained extremely influential in Indian religious memory.

Phrases such as 'Bhagirath effort' are still used today as a symbol of a great effort undertaken for a difficult task.

This is evidence of the long-enduring cultural influence of this narrative.

4. Raghu and the Raghu Dynasty

The name Raghu formed an important literary identity of the Solar dynasty.

Kalidasa's epic Raghuvamsha gave this tradition an extremely influential literary form.

Through Raghu, the ideals of charity, valour, and rajadharma were presented.

Later, Shri Ram, too, was established within this same Raghu-dynasty tradition.

5. Dasharatha and Shri Ram

By the time the narrative reaches from Dasharatha to Ram, the story of the Solar dynasty becomes extremely important, both religiously and culturally.

Shri Ram was regarded as the successor of the Ikshvaku dynasty, a prince of the Raghu dynasty, the king of Ayodhya, Maryada Purushottam (the ideal man of propriety), and, in Vaishnav tradition, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

These various identities gave Ayodhya an extraordinary place in Indian civilization.

6. The Ramayana: The Principal Source

The most important literary source for the study of the Solar dynasty and Shri Ram is the Valmiki Ramayana.

The Ramayana contains a detailed account of Ayodhya, Dasharatha, Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, Shatrughna, Sita, and the tradition of the Ikshvaku dynasty.

In reading this text, it is necessary to keep two levels distinct – the Ramayana is an ancient epic and a religious-cultural text. It may contain elements of historical memory, but it would not be proper to treat each event as a proven event by the standard of modern historiography.

7. Puranic Sources

Many Puranas are important for the study of the Solar dynasty genealogy. In particular, the Vishnu Purana, the Bhagavata Purana, the Vayu Purana, the Brahmanda Purana, the Brahma Purana, the Matsya Purana, and others contain material relating to the Solar dynasty and its kings.

It is necessary to compare the genealogies of these texts with one another.

8. Variants in the Genealogies

Complete agreement is not found among the genealogies of ancient texts.

Some names are found in one source and not in another. In one place, the order of names differs. In another, the same name is found in a different context.

The researcher should therefore not treat any single genealogy, without comparison, as the final historical list.

9. The Historical Importance of Genealogy

Even if a definite date for each king is not available in a genealogy, its importance is not thereby diminished.

A genealogy shows how Indian society remembered its ancient royal dynasties.

It is an important source for the study of cultural memory, royal legitimacy, and religious tradition.

10. The Standard of Modern Historiography

Modern historiography uses many kinds of evidence to establish the existence and period of an ancient king – inscriptions, coins, archaeological strata, contemporary literature, foreign accounts, and other independent sources.

If only much later literary sources are available regarding a king, then determining his definite historical period becomes difficult.

In this book, therefore, careful language will be maintained in such situations.

11. The Balance between Faith and History

On subjects connected with Ayodhya and Shri Ram, the place of faith is extremely important.

But it is also the responsibility of a research treatise to make clear the distinction between evidence and tradition.

The purpose of this book is not to challenge anyone's faith. The purpose is that, wherever tradition exists, it be presented respectfully as tradition; wherever evidence exists, evidence be given; and wherever disagreement exists, that disagreement not be concealed.

This is the honest method of research.

12. The Relationship between Ayodhya and the Solar Dynasty

The study of the Solar dynasty is essential for understanding the cultural identity of Ayodhya.

In the Ramayana and Puranic tradition, Ayodhya is viewed as the capital of the Ikshvaku and Raghu-dynasty kings.

Because of Shri Ram, Ayodhya's identity became still more extensive.

In later ages, this city became a principal centre of devotion to Ram and Vaishnav religious traditions.

13. The Separate Study of the Historicity of Ayodhya

It is necessary to keep in mind that the literary tradition of the Solar dynasty and the archaeological history-tradition of Ayodhya are two separate subjects of research.

Archaeology helps us know in which period a site had human settlement, what kind of material culture existed, and what architecture or remains have been found.

Literature, on the other hand, gives us information about religious, social, and cultural memories.

It is only by combining the two that the broad history of Ayodhya can be written.

14. The Pan-Indian Expansion of the Ram Narrative

The narrative of Shri Ram was never confined to Ayodhya alone.

Different forms of the Ram narrative developed in various regions of India.

Alongside Sanskrit, literature of the Ram narrative developed in Awadhi, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Odia, Kannada, Malayalam, and other languages.

This makes clear that the Ram narrative had become a broad cultural current of Indian civilization.

15. The Ram Narrative Outside India

The influence of the Ram narrative is visible outside India as well.

Local traditions of the Ramayana developed in many countries of Southeast Asia.

Forms of the Ram narrative are visible in the Ramakien tradition of Thailand, the Ramayana tradition of Indonesia, and the art and literature of Cambodia and other regions.

In this way, the cultural memory of Ayodhya and Shri Ram reached beyond the Indian subcontinent as well.

16. The Solar Dynasty: From History to Culture

Viewing the Solar dynasty tradition merely as a list of kings would diminish its real importance.

This tradition establishes a long cultural relationship among royal power → dharma → morality → literature → pilgrimage → popular memory → civilization.

For this reason, the Solar dynasty remains an important subject in the study of Indian civilization.

17. A Final Caution for This Research Treatise

On the basis of this chapter, it would be proper to say that the tradition of the Solar dynasty is deeply preserved within extremely ancient Indian literature and religious memory.

But independent evidence is required to prove the definite historical date of any king, or of any specific event.

This book will therefore use phrases such as 'as described in tradition', 'as mentioned in a literary source', 'according to Puranic genealogy', and 'as established by archaeological/epigraphic evidence' in their appropriate places.

18. Overall Conclusion

The Solar dynasty tradition, beginning with Ikshvaku, is an important part of the long-enduring cultural memory of Indian civilization.

Beginning with Vaivasvata Manu and Ikshvaku, the tradition of Sagara, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Aja, and Dasharatha reaches Shri Ram.

Shri Ram became the most celebrated figure of this tradition, and Ayodhya gained a permanent place in Indian religious-cultural consciousness.

The Ramayana and the Puranas are the principal literary sources of this tradition. Studying them together with archaeological, epigraphic, and other independent sources allows the history of Ayodhya to be understood in a more balanced manner.

19. A Final Research Perspective

The most important conclusion of this chapter is that it is not necessary to regard faith and history as mutually opposed.

It is the responsibility of a researcher to understand the nature of both.

Shri Ram is at the centre of the religious faith of Indian society. The Solar dynasty is an important part of Indian cultural memory, and Ayodhya is the principal geographical and religious centre of this entire tradition.

To present all of these with evidence, review of sources, and fairness will be the fundamental method of this research treatise.

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Conclusion of Chapter 5

The tradition of the Ikshvaku dynasty and the Solar dynasty is an important foundation for understanding the history of Ayodhya. This tradition is not merely a genealogy of kings; it is a long journey of dharma, rajadharma, morality, popular memory, and cultural continuity within Indian civilization.

In this chapter, an effort has been made to present tradition as tradition and evidence as evidence – without exaggerating any fact.

CHAPTER 6

Maharaja Dasharatha and the Governance of Ayodhya

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Part 1: The Personality of Maharaja Dasharatha, His Lineage, and the Governance of Ayodhya

Introduction

The place of Maharaja Dasharatha in the ancient history of Ayodhya is extremely important. As the father of Lord Shri Ram, his name is invoked with particular reverence in Indian religious and cultural tradition, but Dasharatha's importance is not confined to his being the father of Shri Ram alone. In the Valmiki Ramayana, he is portrayed as an esteemed king of the Ikshvaku tradition, the ruler of Ayodhya, a monarch endowed with military strength, and a ruler responsible toward his subjects.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the life and reign of Maharaja Dasharatha not merely on the basis of religious sentiment, but on the basis of available ancient literary sources. Here, in particular, the Valmiki Ramayana, the traditional interpretations of the Ramayana, and related Puranic literature will

form the basis. At the same time, the caution is necessary that the dynastic traditions described in epics and Puranas cannot be treated as equivalent to the definite dates and events of modern history.

1. The Ikshvaku Tradition and Dasharatha

In Indian tradition, the kings of Ayodhya are connected with the Solar dynasty, or the Ikshvaku dynasty. The account of this dynasty's tradition is found, with varying degrees of detail, in different texts. Shri Ram is among the most celebrated figures of this very royal dynasty.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya is introduced not merely as a city, but as a capital in which a long-standing royal tradition was established. In this royal tradition, the office of king was not merely a symbol of personal power; it was connected with dharma, governance, justice, and the protection of subjects.

Maharaja Dasharatha was a ruler of this very tradition. In assessing his reign, it is necessary to understand that the ancient Indian concept of rajadharma differed from the modern democratic system of governance. At that time, the state was centred on the king, but the king was expected to govern according to dharma and to protect his subjects.

2. Dasharatha as King of Ayodhya

In the Bala Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, a detailed introduction is given to Ayodhya and its king, Dasharatha. Dasharatha is described as capable, possessed of learned ministers, and attentive to the welfare of his subjects.

The governance of Ayodhya does not appear to be based on the arbitrary decisions of a single individual. Alongside the king, a council of ministers, priests, and administrative officials also played a role in the system of governance. This indicates that, even in ancient monarchy, counsel and institutional arrangement were important to the decision-making process.

The presence, in Dasharatha's court, of a royal preceptor such as the great sage Vashishtha is an important feature of this system. The royal preceptor was not a figure confined merely to religious rites; in ancient Indian polity, the role of the preceptor in the relationship between dharma and the state was regarded as important.

Thus, Dasharatha's system of governance can be understood on three principal foundations – dharma, counsel, and the protection of subjects.

3. Ayodhya and Rajadharma

In ancient Indian thought, the king was not regarded merely as the owner of the state. He was regarded as the protector of his

subjects. This is why, in the Ramayana, greater importance is given to the happiness of the subjects than to that of the king.

This rajadharma is also visible in Dasharatha's character. He regards his prestige, his word, and the propriety of the kingdom as extremely important. Later, this very quality becomes the greatest test of his life.

When, because of the boons granted to Kaikeyi, the question of Shri Ram's exile arises, Dasharatha is personally shattered by that decision. Even so, he does not reject the word he had earlier given. An important moral question arises here – can a king's personal affection take precedence over rajadharma and a given word?

The narrative of the Ramayana presents its answer to this question through the life of Dasharatha. Dasharatha is thrown into deep sorrow by separation from his son, but he does not decide to break the propriety of his word.

This episode helps in understanding that conception of ancient Indian rajadharma in which word, dharma, and royal prestige were regarded as extremely important.

4. Dasharatha's Military Strength

Dasharatha was not important merely from a religious and administrative standpoint. Ramayana tradition also presents him as a valiant warrior.

Traditional interpretations are found regarding the etymology of his name and his skill in warfare. In the Ramayana, he is also connected with various military campaigns. He appears as a king because of whose military strength Ayodhya was a powerful kingdom.

However, caution is necessary for the historian here. The description, in ancient texts, of a king's valour is often composed in a literary and idealized style. It would not, therefore, be proper to treat every account of warfare as a proven event, complete with date, location, and independent archaeological evidence, in the manner of modern history.

Even so, these descriptions help us understand the ideal royal image of that time – that a king should be one capable of protecting his subjects.

5. The Relationship between King and Subjects

An important element in the description of Ayodhya is the prosperity and security of its subjects.

In the narrative of the Ramayana, Ayodhya is presented as a well-organized, prosperous city, rich in religious and cultural

activity. Such a condition is not considered possible through the king's personal splendour alone; behind it is envisioned an array of systems, such as agriculture, trade, craft, social organization, and administration.

In this context, Dasharatha's rule was not confined to the royal palace alone. Many kinds of officials and functionaries would have been required for the administration of the capital and the kingdom.

Although the Ramayana does not give us, in the modern sense, a detailed account of any ministry, department, or administrative budget, the mention of ministers, priests, soldiers, and other royal servants indicates an organized system of governance.

6. Dasharatha and His Council of Ministers

The mention, in the Valmiki Ramayana, of Dasharatha's ministers is important. The king sought the cooperation of capable advisers in his decisions. This helps us understand that, despite being a monarchy, governance did not depend on the king's personal will alone.

In ancient Indian statecraft tradition, counsel (mantrana) was given particular importance. The king was expected to take advice from ministers who were capable, experienced, and truthful.

Such an arrangement is also visible in Dasharatha's royal court.

From this, an important historical-cultural conclusion emerges – in ancient Indian polity, even though the king was the supreme political authority, he depended on counsel and expert advice for governance.

From this standpoint, it would not be proper to call the governance system of Ayodhya merely a despotic monarchy either. The available literature shows the role of various advisory institutions alongside the king.

7. Dasharatha and Guru Vashishtha

The role of the great sage Vashishtha in Maharaja Dasharatha's reign is particularly noteworthy. Vashishtha holds an important place in the narrative of the Ramayana as the family preceptor and royal priest of the royal household.

The importance of the guru-tradition is visible in the education of Ram, Lakshman, Bharat, and Shatrughna, and in the religious rites of the royal family.

Here we see a distinctive feature of ancient Indian governance – a dialogue between political authority and religious authority.

The king was the representative of administration and political power, while the guru and the priest were the guides of dharma, tradition, and moral order. Though their roles were distinct, they were interconnected in the governance of the state.

This relationship becomes clear again, later in Dasharatha's life, in the episode of Shri Ram's coronation.

8. The Putrakameshti Yajna and the Question of Succession

An important event in Dasharatha's life is the birth of his sons. According to the Ramayana, King Dasharatha had no offspring, and he was troubled by concern over succession. It is in this context that the episode of the Putrakameshti Yajna arises.

The role of Rishyashringa, and the account of the birth of Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughna after the yajna, form a principal part of the narrative of the Ramayana.

This episode is not merely a religious tale; within it, an important problem of ancient governance is also visible – the question of succession.

In dynastic rule, the existence of a successor was connected with the stability of the kingdom. Who would receive power after the king's death was not merely a family matter, but a question of the political stability of the entire kingdom.

It is therefore natural that Dasharatha's childlessness receives particular importance in the Ramayana.

9. Dasharatha's Four Sons and the Royal Family

With the birth of Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughna, the possibilities of succession are established in the royal family of Ayodhya.

The upbringing of all four princes takes place according to royal tradition. Different qualities are given prominence in their characters.

Ram – a symbol of propriety, dharma, and the ideal.

Bharat – a symbol of sacrifice and brotherly devotion.

Lakshman – a symbol of service and surrender.

Shatrughna – a symbol of brotherly service and devotion to duty.

In this way, Dasharatha's family does not remain merely a dynastic family; it becomes a principal example of ideal family relationships within Indian culture.

Conclusion: A King, A Father, and A Rajadharma

The character of Maharaja Dasharatha can be understood at three levels.

First – as king, he is at the centre of the political system of Ayodhya.

Second – as the representative of the Ikshvaku dynasty, he is the successor of a long royal tradition.

Third — as father, he is a person of deep affection toward all four sons, including Ram.

The greatest tragedy of his life is precisely this — that the dharma of the king and the love of the father come to stand opposed to one another.

The Dasharatha of the Ramayana becomes an extremely influential character precisely because of this human conflict. He is not merely an ideal king, but also a human being struggling amid joy and sorrow, attachment, duty, word, and dharma.

In the Part that follows, we shall undertake a systematic study of the administrative structure of Ayodhya, the council of ministers, the royal palace, the army, the economy, the social order of its subjects, and the social structure of the kingdom during Dasharatha's reign. There, it will also be clarified separately which matters are based on the direct description of the Valmiki Ramayana, and which come from later traditions.

— End of Chapter 6, Part 1 —

Part 2: Administrative System, Council of Ministers, and the Protection of Subjects

1. The Governance of Ayodhya: An Organized System Centred on the King

To understand the Ayodhya of Maharaja Dasharatha's time, it is first necessary to see how ancient Indian polity functioned. Unlike a modern state, democratic institutions, an elected government, and a written constitution did not exist at that time. Governance was centred on the king, but the king did not administer the kingdom alone.

In the Ayodhya Kanda and Bala Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, mention is found of the king, ministers, priests, army commanders, and various royal officials. This indicates that Ayodhya had an organized administrative structure for governance.

The principal duties of the king were – protecting the kingdom; maintaining a system of justice; protecting the subjects; managing the treasury; protecting dharma and the social order; taking counsel from capable ministers; and, when necessary, leading in war.

From this standpoint, it would not be proper to understand Dasharatha's authority merely as the authority of the royal palace. He was a ruler positioned at the head of a broad system of state.

2. The Importance of the Council of Ministers

Among the most important features of Dasharatha's system of governance was the place given to counsel. The Valmiki Ramayana mentions ministers and royal advisers alongside the king.

It was regarded as necessary that the king not take important decisions alone, but consult experienced and capable persons. In ancient Indian political thought, this was called mantrana (counsel).

The task of ministers was not merely to praise the king. An ideal minister was expected to give proper advice in the interest of the state, to analyse the circumstances, and to make the king aware of possible consequences.

This is why the Ramayana portrays Dasharatha's court as a royal assembly in which experienced persons are present alongside the king.

This arrangement tells us an important thing about ancient Indian political thought — the king may be the supreme ruler, but good governance requires him to have capable counsel.

3. The Priest and the System of Governance

The place of the great sage Vashishtha in the governance of Ayodhya is extremely important. He is described as the family preceptor and royal priest of the royal household.

It would not be proper to understand the role of the royal priest as confined merely to worship and ritual. In ancient Indian royal tradition, the priest's guidance regarding the king's religious duties, royal rites, and dharma-compliant conduct was regarded as important.

The relationship between Dasharatha and Vashishtha represents precisely this tradition.

The presence of religious teachers in religious rites, yajnas, rituals, and royal decisions on important occasions of state indicates that, at that time, rajadharma and religious tradition were deeply interconnected.

However, it would not be proper to call this a theocracy in the modern sense. The king was the head of political authority, while the guru and the priest provided religious and moral guidance.

4. The Royal Assembly and the Decision-Making Process

The royal assembly (raja-sabha) held an important place in the governance of Ayodhya. The king deliberated on important matters in the assembly and obtained the opinions of various advisers.

In the episode of the preparations for Shri Ram's coronation in the Ramayana, too, mention is found of Dasharatha's deliberations with his ministers and prominent persons.

This episode is particularly important.

Dasharatha was advancing in age, and he considered making Ram the heir apparent. This decision is not presented merely as a family decision; its process is also visible at the level of the state.

This shows that the question of succession was a matter connected with the stability of the kingdom.

The king did not choose his successor merely because he was his son; the capacity to govern, the trust of the subjects, and the ability to uphold rajadharma were also regarded as important in a successor.

5. Succession and the Stability of the Kingdom

The most important political question of Dasharatha's life was the succession among his sons.

Ram was the eldest son, and Dasharatha desired to make him heir apparent. The love of the subjects of Ayodhya for Ram is described in the Ramayana in an extremely powerful manner.

Here we see an important feature of ancient monarchy — a clear successor was necessary for the stability of the kingdom.

If a dispute over succession arose after the king's death, political instability could result in the kingdom. Dasharatha's decision to crown Ram was, therefore, not merely a father's emotional

decision; behind it, the need for political stability can also be understood.

But circumstances suddenly change because of Kaikeyi's boons.

The demand arises that Ram be sent into exile and Bharat given the kingdom. It is at precisely this point that the greatest test of Dasharatha's reign occurs.

6. The Army and the Security of the Kingdom

The army was an extremely necessary institution for an ancient state. One of the king's principal duties was to protect the kingdom and its subjects from external powers.

Dasharatha is presented in the Ramayana as a skilled and valiant king in warfare. This makes clear that Ayodhya possessed military strength, and that the king himself was regarded as a ruler who took part in battle.

Ancient Indian texts describe various components of an army. But it would not be proper, without caution, to present a definite structure resembling a modern military organization for the Ayodhya of Dasharatha's time.

We shall, therefore, accept only this much conclusion in this treatise – Ramayana tradition presents Ayodhya as a powerful royal centre, and Dasharatha as its capable military ruler. Figures

or specific military structures beyond this should be accepted only when independent evidence for them is available.

7. The Treasury and the Economic System

A treasury is necessary for the functioning of any organized state. Resources were required for the army, administration, royal construction, religious rites, and other state functions.

The Ramayana describes the prosperity of Ayodhya, its markets, buildings, elephants, horses, and various kinds of people. This presents a literary picture of the economic activity of that city.

But an important caution is necessary here.

The description of Ayodhya's prosperity in the Ramayana is not given in the form of modern economic statistics. It would not, therefore, be evidence-based to give modern figures such as a definite gross output, tax rate, or revenue for the economy of that time.

Even so, it can be understood, from the literary descriptions, that Ayodhya is presented in the ideal form of a developed and prosperous capital.

8. Protection of Subjects: The King's Supreme Duty

Extreme importance is given, in Indian rajadharma, to the protection of subjects.

A king did not mean merely a person who governs. The king was expected to protect his subjects, to provide justice, and to maintain order in the kingdom.

The concept of the ideal king appears repeatedly in the Ramayana. Later, this ideal attains its full expression in the character of Shri Ram, but its background is also visible in Dasharatha's reign.

Dasharatha is portrayed as a king connected with his subjects. The feelings of the citizens of Ayodhya receive particular place in the Ramayana.

At the time of Ram's exile, the grief of the people of Ayodhya does not remain merely the grief of the royal family. The entire city is affected.

This literary portrayal indicates that the Ramayana regards the emotional and political relationship between king and subjects as extremely important.

9. Justice and Rajadharma

One of the king's principal duties was to administer justice. In ancient Indian tradition, justice was not regarded merely as a system of punishment; it was connected with the establishment of dharma.

The king was expected to make decisions in accordance with dharma.

In Dasharatha's character, the keeping of his word becomes the ultimate expression of precisely this rajadharma.

The episode of the boons given to Kaikeyi is extremely important from both a political and a moral standpoint. Dasharatha could personally have opposed that decision, but he faced the question of his previously given word.

His heart was inclined toward his son Ram, but rajadharma and the propriety of his word led him in a different direction.

It is precisely this conflict that makes Dasharatha an extremely human character.

10. Dasharatha's Governance: A Balance of Power and Propriety

Studying Dasharatha's system of governance, two aspects appear together.

On the one hand, he is a powerful king – he has an army, a royal assembly, ministers, and a vast capital.

On the other, he is a king bound by the propriety of dharma and his word.

This is the fundamental concept of Indian rajadharma – that the king should be powerful, but that his power should be governed by dharma.

If a king has power but no dharma, the state can become a tool of oppression. And if a king is devoted to dharma but unable to protect the state, the subjects may become insecure.

The Dasharatha of the Ramayana appears as a ruler who maintains a balance between these two, although, in the final phase of his life, this very system turns into a terrible personal tragedy.

11. A Necessary Caution from a Historical Standpoint

The most necessary thing when undertaking research on the subject of Ayodhya and Dasharatha is to understand the nature of the sources.

The Valmiki Ramayana is a great Sanskrit epic, and its religious, literary, and cultural importance for Indian civilization is extremely profound. But in modern historiography, the description of any ancient text is viewed with attention to its nature, its compositional tradition, and its textual history.

It is therefore necessary, in this book, to keep three levels distinct – first, what is described in the text; second, how later religious

and cultural tradition understood it; third, what modern history, archaeology, and other independent evidence can establish from it.

It would not be proper, from a research standpoint, to treat these three as a single form of evidence.

Our purpose is not to diminish anyone's faith, but to maintain a clear distinction between fact and tradition, while respecting both faith and history.

Conclusion of Part 2

Viewing Maharaja Dasharatha's reign from the perspective of the Ramayana, Ayodhya emerges as an organized royal centre. Mention is found of a council of ministers, a royal priest, military strength, and other royal arrangements alongside the king. The king's supreme duty is regarded as the protection of subjects and governance in accordance with dharma.

Dasharatha's greatest political concern was the stability of the kingdom and the question of succession. His desire to make Ram the heir apparent was important precisely in this context. But Kaikeyi's boons changed this entire arrangement.

It is from this point that the chapter of Ayodhya's history begins which influenced Indian culture for centuries to come – Ram's departure for the forest.

In the Part that follows, carrying this sequence forward, we shall undertake a research-based study of Dasharatha's decision, Kaikeyi's boons, Ram's exile, and the conflict between rajadharma and family affection.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda

3. Valmiki Ramayana – description of Ayodhya and the episode of the dialogue between Dasharatha and Ram

4. Vishnu Purana – tradition relating to the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku dynasty

5. Bhagavata Purana – account relating to the genealogy of the Solar dynasty

– End of Chapter 6, Part 2 –

Part 3: Kaikeyi's Boons, Shri Ram's Exile, and Dasharatha's Crisis of Dharma

1. Preparations for Ram's Coronation

The most important political occasion of Maharaja Dasharatha's reign was when he decided to make Shri Ram the heir apparent.

The Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana gives a detailed account of the reverence and love of the citizens of Ayodhya for Ram. Impressed by Ram's virtues, Dasharatha wished to entrust him with the responsibility of the kingdom.

Dasharatha's age had advanced, and he wanted the governance of the kingdom to be secure in the hands of a capable successor. Behind this decision lay a father's love, but also a consideration for the stability of the kingdom.

Ram was the eldest son, and qualities such as truth, self-restraint, valour, compassion, and adherence to dharma are given prominence in his character. Dasharatha's idea of making Ram the heir apparent, therefore, appears natural from a political standpoint as well.

Preparations for the coronation begin in Ayodhya.

But at this very moment, the direction of events suddenly changes.

2. The Episode of Kaikeyi and Manthara

According to the Ramayana, Kaikeyi's maidservant Manthara told her about Ram's coronation. Manthara attempted to convince Kaikeyi that, once Ram became king, Bharat's position would become weak.

This episode is extremely important, for it is here that a private conversation within the royal family changes the political future of the entire kingdom.

Kaikeyi had earlier held affection for Ram. But her mind changes because of Manthara's words, and she decides to demand the two boons that Dasharatha had earlier promised to grant her.

It is necessary here, from a research standpoint, to make one thing clear — the detailed account of the conversation between Manthara and Kaikeyi is part of the narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana. It would not be proper to present it as evidence of a modern political conspiracy. Its importance lies chiefly within the moral and narrative structure of the Ramayana.

3. Kaikeyi's Two Boons

Kaikeyi demands her two old boons from Dasharatha.

The first — that Bharat be made king of Ayodhya.

The second — that Ram be sent into exile for fourteen years.

Both of these demands break Dasharatha from within.

His love for Ram was so deep that he could not even imagine sending Ram to the forest. But he had earlier given his word to grant Kaikeyi these boons.

It is at precisely this point that the greatest crisis of dharma in Dasharatha's life arises.

On the one hand – love for his son. On the other – a given word.

As king, though he wished to withdraw from his word, he is unable to break it.

4. The Word and the King's Prestige

In ancient Indian rajadharma, truth and the keeping of one's word are regarded as extremely important for a king.

Dasharatha faced an extraordinary circumstance. He knew that Ram's going to the forest would break his own heart. Even so, he is unable entirely to reject the word he had given.

Here, the Ramayana places before the king a profound moral question – can a king break his word because of his personal love?

Dasharatha's character answers this question through his own conduct. He has no wish to send Ram to the forest, but nor can he find a way to be freed from his word.

For this reason, his life becomes an example of a king in whom personal desire and rajadharma stand opposed to one another.

5. Dasharatha's Mental Anguish

The description of Dasharatha's anguish in the Ramayana is extremely poignant.

He repeatedly entreats Kaikeyi to change this decision. He finds it difficult to accept that the very Ram whose coronation was being prepared must now go to the forest.

Here, Dasharatha ceases to be merely a king. He becomes an anguished father.

This episode of the Ramayana is among the most powerful depictions of the father-son relationship in Indian literature.

Dasharatha's condition shows that royal power and personal life are not always separate. The king, too, is human, and his decisions can have a profound effect upon his family and his emotions.

6. Shri Ram's Decision

When Shri Ram receives news of his exile, his conduct appears entirely different from that of Dasharatha.

Dasharatha is shattered, but Ram remains calm.

For Ram, his father's word is itself dharma. He does not become angry with Kaikeyi or contend within the palace. He prepares to leave the kingdom, the throne, and its splendour, and to go to the forest.

It is from this point that an important foundation of Ram's propriety is built within Indian culture.

Ram's view is clear – the father has given his word; the son must therefore uphold that word.

This decision was not merely obedience to family authority. For Ram, it was a matter of dharma and propriety.

7. The Kingdom versus Personal Right

If this episode is viewed from a political standpoint, an important question arises.

Ram was the eldest son, and his coronation was about to take place. Even so, he does not contend for his right.

He neither takes the support of the army, nor attempts to rally the subjects to his side, nor contends with his brothers for royal power.

On the contrary, he himself relinquishes the kingdom.

It is precisely this that distinguishes him, in the ideal of the Ramayana, from an ordinary prince.

For him, dharma was greater than the kingdom.

It should also be kept in mind here that this is not an example of a modern political system. It is a moral ideal presented within an ancient dynastic and religious narrative.

8. Lakshman's Decision

On hearing the news of Ram's departure for the forest, Lakshman, too, decides to go with him.

In this episode, Lakshman's character becomes a symbol of brotherly devotion and service.

He does not wish Ram to go to the forest alone. For him, the comfort of the royal palace becomes meaningless when Ram is going to the forest.

This role of Lakshman also becomes a source of additional anguish for Dasharatha.

On the one hand Ram is departing, and on the other, his beloved son Lakshman, too, is prepared to go to the forest with him.

9. Sita's Departure for the Forest

Sita, too, decides to go to the forest with Ram.

Ram advises her to remain in Ayodhya and describes the hardships of forest life. But Sita remains firm in her decision to remain with her husband.

This episode is presented, in the Ramayana, as an important example of marital devotion and sacrifice.

For Dasharatha, this situation becomes even more painful.

The very son whose coronation was being prepared is now going to the forest; with him, Lakshman and Sita are also going.

The festivity of the royal palace turns into mourning.

10. The Reaction of the People of Ayodhya

The impact of Ram's departure for the forest is not confined to the royal family alone.

The Valmiki Ramayana describes the deep affection of the people of Ayodhya for Ram. The city's people are grieved by Ram's departure for the forest.

This episode presents an important literary picture of the relationship between king and subjects.

If Ram had been merely a prince, with no connection to the subjects, his departure for the forest would not have produced such a wide-ranging social impact.

The Ramayana presents Ram as a prince beloved of his subjects.

11. Dasharatha and the Final Test of Rajadharma

At the time of Ram's departure for the forest, Dasharatha's greatest problem was that he himself had not given any order that his heart could accept.

But the boons demanded by Kaikeyi, and Dasharatha's earlier word, bring him to a situation in which he is compelled to separate from his own son.

Dasharatha's weakness is also visible in this event.

He is king, yet bound by his old word to Kaikeyi.

He is father, yet unable to stop Ram.

He is ruler, yet unable to separate the tragedy of his personal life from the state.

Thus, Dasharatha's character is not entirely idealized. It contains both strength and weakness; both rajadharma and human attachment.

It is precisely this that makes him, from a literary standpoint, an extremely important character.

12. The Episode of Shravan Kumar and Dasharatha's Earlier Suffering

Another celebrated episode connected with Dasharatha's life is that of Shravan Kumar.

In the Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, Dasharatha himself recalls an event of his own life in which, while shooting a sound-guided arrow, he unknowingly wounded a young man named Shravan. Shravan was serving his parents. In grief for their son, his parents cursed Dasharatha, saying that he, too, would have to bear the sorrow of separation from a son.

This episode connects the tragedy of Dasharatha's life with Ram's exile.

Even in interpreting this episode, however, it should be made clear that this is a religious-literary narrative of the Ramayana. It would not be proper to present it as an independently proven event of modern history.

At the level of narrative, its importance is extremely profound – an earlier fault in Dasharatha's life is connected, in a single moral thread, with the separation from Ram that follows later.

13. Dasharatha's End

After Ram's departure for the forest, Dasharatha becomes extremely sorrowful.

He remembers Ram again and again, and, ultimately, passes away in separation from his son.

Here, the Ramayana conveys an extremely profound message – even a king is not free from the consequences of his own actions and decisions.

Dasharatha's life, beginning in royal splendour, reaches its poignant end in separation from his son.

The tragedy of his life was not that he was a weak king. It was that, fulfilling simultaneously the roles of king, husband, and father, he became trapped in a crisis of decision that he himself could not change.

A Historical and Research-Based Note

The narrative of Dasharatha and Ram's exile is among the most influential traditions of Indian civilization. But in presenting it in this book, we must keep three matters distinct.

1. Religious tradition – the narrative described in the Ramayana is an important foundation of faith and cultural memory.

2. Literary source – the Valmiki Ramayana is the principal ancient Sanskrit source of this narrative.

3. Modern history – establishing the definite date of Dasharatha's reign, its administrative boundaries, and its events on the basis of independent archaeological evidence is a separate subject of research.

In this treatise, therefore, we shall present what is described in the Ramayana as the description of the Ramayana, and modern historical conclusions on the basis of independent evidence.

This will be the honesty of our research method.

Conclusion of Part 3

The life of Maharaja Dasharatha gives us an extremely complex picture of ancient Indian rajadharma.

He was a powerful king, but he became bound before his own word.

He loved Ram deeply, but he could not stop Ram from going to the forest.

He was the ruler of Ayodhya, but, ultimately, in separation from his son, he became a helpless father.

And Shri Ram placed his father's word above his own personal right.

This very event, going forward, gave a permanent place, in Indian civilization, to Ram's propriety, Dasharatha's sacrifice, and the cultural memory of Ayodhya.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, episodes relating to the preparations for Ram's coronation and his exile.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, the episode of Kaikeyi's boons.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, Dasharatha's separation from Ram and his death.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, the episode of Shravan Kumar.

5. Vishnu Purana, tradition relating to the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku dynasty.

– End of Chapter 6, Part 3 –

Part 4: Bharat's Sacrifice, Ram's Sandals, and the Governance of Ayodhya

1. Ayodhya after Dasharatha's Death

After Shri Ram's departure for the forest, the royal palace of Ayodhya is plunged into mourning. King Dasharatha is unable to bear separation from Ram, and he passes away.

Now the greatest question facing Ayodhya was – who would govern the kingdom?

Ram was in the forest. Lakshman, too, was with him. Dasharatha had passed away, and Bharat was not present in Ayodhya at that time.

In this situation, the kingdom faced not merely a family crisis, but also a serious question of royal succession.

2. Bharat Summoned to Ayodhya

According to the Ramayana, Bharat was at his maternal grandfather's house. When he was summoned to Ayodhya, he did not initially know what had occurred there.

On reaching Ayodhya, he saw the changed atmosphere of the city.

Where preparations for celebration should have been under way, there was mourning instead.

When Bharat received news of Dasharatha's death and Ram's exile, he was thrown into deep grief.

In particular, when he learned that Ram had had to go to the forest because of his mother Kaikeyi's boons, and that arrangements had been made to give him the kingdom, he did not accept this decision.

3. Bharat Did Not Regard the Kingdom as His Right

The most important feature of Bharat's character is precisely this – that he did not accept the throne of Ayodhya as his right.

He knew that Ram was the eldest son, and that Dasharatha's original wish had been to make Ram the heir apparent.

Bharat, therefore, did not regard the kingdom as an achievement gained for himself.

Here, the Ramayana presents an extremely important ideal of renunciation with regard to royal power.

Had Bharat wished, he could have taken advantage of the circumstances and become king. But he did not do so.

He clearly regarded Ram alone as the rightful king of Ayodhya.

4. Bharat's Opposition to Kaikeyi

Bharat is also extremely grieved by his mother Kaikeyi's conduct.

He refuses to accept Ram's exile and Dasharatha's death.

This episode is particularly important because Bharat's character is viewed separately from his mother's action.

Bharat rejects the very purpose for which Kaikeyi had demanded the boons.

Through this, the Ramayana conveys an important moral message – the fault of a person's deed should not automatically be attributed to their relative.

Despite being his mother's son, Bharat did not accept her decision.

5. The Decision to Bring Ram Back

Bharat's decision was clear – Ram should be brought back from the forest and made king of Ayodhya.

For this, Bharat sets out toward the forest, taking with him the principal people of Ayodhya, elders, and members of the royal family.

This journey was not merely a journey to bring back a brother.

It was an attempt to re-establish that royal order which had been thrown into crisis by Dasharatha's death and Kaikeyi's boons.

6. The Meeting of Bharat and Ram

The meeting of Bharat and Ram in the forest is among the most poignant episodes of the Ramayana.

Bharat entreats Ram to return to Ayodhya.

He tells him that Dasharatha is no longer in this world, and that Ayodhya needs Ram.

But Ram is not prepared to go back on his decision.

Before him lay the same principle – his father had given his word, and that word had to be fulfilled.

For Ram, the fourteen years of exile were not merely a personal hardship. They had become a matter of upholding his father's word and dharma.

7. Bharat and Ram: A Confluence of Two Ideals

Here, the characters of both Ram and Bharat come to the fore together.

Ram says – his father's word must be fulfilled.

Bharat says – the kingdom belongs to Ram, and he should return.

The sentiments of the two brothers are not opposed to one another.

Ram wishes to uphold the propriety of dharma.

Bharat wishes to uphold brotherly dharma and the proper order of the kingdom.

Thus, in the Ramayana, both brothers appear devoted to their own respective duties.

8. The Episode of the Sandals

When Ram is not prepared to return, Bharat asks him for his sandals.

Ram gives his sandals to Bharat.

Bharat takes those sandals to Ayodhya and installs them upon the throne.

This episode became extremely symbolic within Indian culture.

Here, the sandals cease to be merely Ram's possession.

They become a symbol of Ram's legitimacy, his dharma, and his royal right.

Bharat does not regard himself as a king taking Ram's place. He appears as a representative governing the kingdom on Ram's behalf.

9. Nandigram and Bharat's Life

According to Ramayana tradition, Bharat does not live a life of royal comfort in the palace of Ayodhya; instead, he dwells at Nandigram, awaiting Ram's return.

He governs the kingdom, keeping Ram's sandals before him.

This episode became an extremely important symbol in Indian political and moral thought – power is not a person's private property, but a responsibility.

Although capable of occupying the throne, Bharat does not regard it as his right.

He views the kingdom as Ram's trust.

10. The Concept of the Sandal-Kingdom

The installation of Ram's sandals upon the throne gives rise to a profound cultural concept.

The king is absent, but his dharma and his right are present.

Bharat regards himself not as the owner of power, but as the guardian of Ram's kingdom.

This episode points us toward an ideal of ancient Indian rajadharma – royal power is not a means of personal enjoyment, but a responsibility toward one's subjects.

However, it would not be proper to regard the 'sandal-kingdom' as equivalent to modern constitutional governance. It is a distinctive concept developed within the religious and moral narrative of the Ramayana.

11. The Continuation of Ayodhya's Governance

Despite Ram's exile, the kingdom did not become entirely without governance.

Administration continued under Bharat's leadership. The royal family, elders, and the administrative system played their role in the running of the kingdom.

This helps us understand that the governance of Ayodhya did not depend solely on the king's personal presence.

The king was the supreme centre, but beneath him, an administrative system and royal institutions functioned.

Maintaining the order of the kingdom despite Dasharatha's death and Ram's absence is an indication of precisely this.

12. Rajadharma More Important than Royal Power

Viewing Dasharatha's reign and the events that followed together, an important idea comes to the fore.

Dasharatha gave importance to the propriety of his word.

Ram gave up the kingdom to uphold his father's word.

Bharat, despite obtaining the kingdom, did not regard it as his right.

Thus, through all three characters, the Ramayana presents, in different forms, one and the same fundamental idea – dharma and duty stand above royal power.

It is this very idea that later becomes the foundation of the concept of Ram Rajya.

13. A Caution from the Standpoint of Modern History

The episodes relating to Bharat, Ram's sandals, and Nandigram are extremely important within Indian religious and cultural tradition.

But it is necessary for the modern historian to make clear the nature of their sources.

The Valmiki Ramayana is the principal literary source of these events. Many later Ramayana texts, Puranas, folk traditions, and regional narratives extended these episodes in various forms.

It will therefore be necessary, when connecting any particular site with an event of the Ramayana, to consider – in which ancient text it is mentioned; since when the local tradition has existed;

what the archaeological evidence is; and what conclusions modern historical research draws from it.

Respect for tradition and clarity of evidence must proceed together.

14. From Dasharatha to Ram: The Political Continuity of Ayodhya

Even after Dasharatha's death, the royal tradition of Ayodhya did not come to an end.

Dasharatha's greatest concern had been the succession and stability of the kingdom. This arrangement came into temporary crisis because of Ram's exile, but Bharat, rather than contending for power, accepted Ram's legitimacy.

Thus, the events from Dasharatha to Ram, and from Ram to Bharat, are not merely a family narrative.

Within them are also visible political ideas such as succession, rajadharma, one's word, legitimacy, and the renunciation of power.

Conclusion

The crisis in which Maharaja Dasharatha's reign came to an end was handled by Bharat, through sacrifice and dharma, rather than turning it into a struggle for power.

In Dasharatha's life, the word was supreme.

In Ram's life, dharma remained supreme.

In Bharat's life, brotherly devotion and the renunciation of power remained supreme.

For this reason, the narrative of Ayodhya does not remain merely the story of one dynasty. It becomes, within Indian civilization, a long cultural memory of ideal governance and ideal duty.

In the Part that follows, we shall study the political and social effects connected with Ayodhya during Ram's exile, the nature of Bharat's governance, and the condition of the kingdom until Ram's return.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Bharat's arrival in Ayodhya and his meeting with Ram

3. Valmiki Ramayana – the episode of Ram's sandals and Bharat's residence at Nandigram

4. Valmiki Ramayana – the condition of Ayodhya after Dasharatha's death

5. Vishnu Purana – tradition relating to the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku dynasty

Part 5: Dasharatha's Rajadharma, the Achievements of His Reign, and a Historical-Cultural Assessment

1. The Overall Character of Dasharatha's Reign

The character of Maharaja Dasharatha appears in Ramayana tradition not merely as the father of Shri Ram, but as an esteemed monarch of Ayodhya. His reign is described chiefly in the Valmiki Ramayana, where Ayodhya is presented as a prosperous, well-organized, and powerful capital.

Three principal foundations come to the fore in understanding Dasharatha's reign – the security of the kingdom, the protection of subjects, and governance in accordance with dharma.

The king possessed military strength, but his rajadharma was more important still. He was regarded as responsible for protecting his subjects, maintaining order in the kingdom, and upholding the traditional religious-social system.

2. The Prosperity of Ayodhya

The Valmiki Ramayana describes Ayodhya as an extremely splendid city.

Mention is found of beautiful buildings, highways, markets, gardens, water sources, and the presence of people of various classes in the city. The number of elephants and horses, and the decoration of the city, are also described.

From these descriptions, the Ayodhya of the Ramayana emerges as a prosperous urban centre.

But an important distinction is necessary here from a research standpoint.

The description of Ayodhya's prosperity is part of the literary narrative of the Ramayana. It cannot be used to establish how large the economic system of that time was in modern terms, or what the revenue was.

We may therefore say that – the Valmiki Ramayana presents Ayodhya in the ideal form of a prosperous and well-organized capital.

3. The Relationship between Subjects and King

An important feature of Dasharatha's reign is the relationship between king and subjects.

In the Ramayana, the citizens of Ayodhya are shown as connected with the king and the royal family. The grief of the subjects at the time of Ram's exile makes this relationship still clearer.

The king was not merely a ruler who collected taxes. In ideal rajadharma, he was regarded as the protector and nurturer of his subjects.

This is why the term 'protector of the people' (prajapalaka) is found used for the king in Indian tradition.

Dasharatha's image is built precisely within this ideal.

4. The Limit of Dharma for the King

Dasharatha was a powerful king, but his power was not regarded as unlimited.

He was bound by the propriety of dharma.

The episode of Kaikeyi's boons is the greatest example of this.

Dasharatha did not wish to send Ram to the forest. He was king, and could, had he wished, have refused Kaikeyi's demand. But he restrained himself from breaking the word he had earlier given.

Here, an important political ideal of the Ramayana comes to the fore – even the king is subject to dharma.

The king may be the supreme political authority of the state, but he is not above the propriety of dharma and truth.

5. Dasharatha's Greatest Virtue: Keeping His Word

Both the greatest virtue and the greatest tragedy of Dasharatha's life are connected with his word.

He gave Kaikeyi his word to grant her boons.

When Kaikeyi demanded those very boons, he could not withdraw from them.

The consequences of this decision were extremely sorrowful – Ram went to the forest. Lakshman went with him. Sita, too, went to the forest. Ayodhya was plunged into mourning. And Dasharatha himself died in separation from Ram.

Even so, in the view of the Ramayana, Dasharatha's keeping of his word reflects the seriousness of rajadharma.

6. Dasharatha's Human Weakness

It would also be incomplete to regard Dasharatha merely as an ideal king.

Human weaknesses are clearly visible in his character.

He loves his son Ram extremely deeply. He is emotionally shattered before Kaikeyi. He wishes to change his decision but is unable to escape the circumstance.

Thus, Dasharatha's character tells us that – being a king does not end one's being human.

Behind royal power, too, emotions, family, love, fear, and personal suffering remain present.

It is precisely this human aspect that makes Dasharatha an extremely influential character in Indian literature.

7. Ram as Successor

Dasharatha's decision to make Ram the heir apparent is important in the context of the governance system of Ayodhya.

Ram was the eldest son, and the Ramayana presents him as a capable, self-restrained prince beloved of his subjects.

His selection therefore does not appear to be based on birth order alone; his qualities, too, are given prominence in the narrative.

Had Ram's coronation been completed, there would have been a peaceful transfer of royal power from Dasharatha to Ram.

But this process was halted because of Kaikeyi's boons.

It is from this point that the political system of Ayodhya enters an extraordinary situation.

8. Bharat's Sacrifice and the Protection of the Governance System

After Dasharatha's death, Bharat had the opportunity to obtain the kingdom.

But he did not regard the kingdom as his right.

He accepted Ram as the true successor, and installed his sandals upon the throne.

This episode became a symbol of the fact that the real meaning of power is not right, but responsibility.

Bharat's role is important precisely because he did not allow a potential power struggle within the royal family to grow.

He maintained his loyalty toward Ram, and held the governance of Ayodhya together.

9. From Dasharatha's Reign to Ram Rajya

The discussion of Dasharatha's reign ultimately leads us to the concept of Ram Rajya.

In Indian tradition, Ram Rajya does not mean merely the rule of Ram. Within it, many concepts of ideal governance are connected –

justice; the security of subjects; adherence to dharma; the responsible role of the king; social order; and public welfare.

The background of these ideals is visible in the narrative of Dasharatha's reign.

Dasharatha's reign is therefore not a subject separate from Ram Rajya. Rather, it is the preceding ground of that very royal tradition within which Shri Ram is later established as the ideal king.

10. Was Dasharatha a Historical King?

This question is extremely important from a research standpoint.

In Indian religious tradition, Dasharatha is an esteemed king. A detailed portrayal of his character is found in the Valmiki Ramayana, and mention of him is also found in later Puranas and Ramayana traditions.

But, by modern historical standards, to establish any person historically requires independent evidence beyond literary tradition.

The material currently available regarding Dasharatha is found chiefly in epics, Puranas, and religious-cultural traditions.

The honest research method will therefore be for us to – present Dasharatha, with full respect, as the esteemed king of Ramayana tradition, but not use the definite language of modern history where independent historical evidence is not available.

This will do justice to both fact and faith.

11. Dasharatha and the Historical Memory of Ayodhya

Dasharatha's importance was not confined to his lifetime alone.

In the cultural memory of Ayodhya, his name has been connected, for centuries, with Ram, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, Sumitra, and other members of the royal family.

Dasharatha's character has remained continuously alive in Indian folk tales, religious rituals, Ramlila, literature, and art.

In particular, the image of 'Dasharatha, the father of Ram' is so deeply embedded in Indian society that Dasharatha's name itself became synonymous with the Ram narrative.

12. Dasharatha's Place in the History of Ayodhya

Viewing the history of Ayodhya across broad periods, Dasharatha's era is connected with the ancient royal tradition of the Ramayana.

After him comes the narrative of Ram's exile, Bharat's administration, and, ultimately, Ram's return to Ayodhya.

Bharat's role in the narrative of Ayodhya is, therefore, like a point of junction.

Under his reign, Ayodhya appears with its royal power and prosperity.

In his final period, this same Ayodhya passes through family and political crisis.

And then, through Ram, this same Ayodhya becomes connected with the most celebrated cultural concept of Indian ideal governance – Ram Rajya.

13. Our Conclusion from a Research Standpoint

In this book, we shall adopt the following method regarding Maharaja Dasharatha –

Whatever is found in the Valmiki Ramayana, we shall present connected with the source of the Ramayana.

Whatever is found in the Puranas, we shall separately identify as a Puranic source.

Whatever is found in folk tradition, we shall present as folk tradition.

And wherever independent evidence is not available from modern history or archaeology, we shall not present it as a definite historical fact.

This will preserve the greatest strength of this book – research with reverence, and honesty with research.

Conclusion

Maharaja Dasharatha's reign represents, within Indian tradition, a rajadharma in which power is joined with propriety, royal authority with responsibility, and personal life with dharma.

In his reign, Ayodhya is portrayed as a prosperous capital. His court has ministers and priests; the kingdom has military strength; and the protection of subjects is important for the king.

But the greatest test of Dasharatha's life was not the prosperity of the kingdom, but the crisis of Ram's exile.

He kept his word, but that very word gave him separation from his son.

Thus, the narrative of Dasharatha teaches us that rajadharma is not merely a matter of obtaining power; it is also a test of fulfilling one's duty in difficult circumstances.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda

3. Vishnu Purana – the Solar dynasty and the Ikshvaku dynasty

4. Bhagavata Purana – the genealogy of the Solar dynasty

5. Various traditional interpretations of the Ramayana and Indian cultural tradition

CHAPTER 7

Lord Shri Ram: Life, Personality, and Ideals

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Part 1: Shri Ram's Birth, Dynastic Lineage, and Childhood

Introduction

The place of Shri Ram in the history, religion, literature, and popular memory of Indian civilization is extremely distinctive. He is established, in Indian cultural consciousness, not merely as a prince of Ayodhya or an ancient king, but as a symbol of propriety, truth, duty, sacrifice, and ideal governance.

The most ancient and principal literary foundation of Shri Ram's life is the Valmiki Ramayana. Beyond this, the Ram narrative developed in the Mahabharata, the Puranas, various Sanskrit texts, regional Ramayanas, folk traditions, Ramlila, and the literature of Indian languages.

In this chapter, we shall study these sources while keeping them distinct from one another. Wherever the description of the Valmiki Ramayana is given, it will be presented as belonging to that very source. Later traditions, too, will be viewed within their own independent context.

Our purpose is not to diminish faith, but to carry both faith and research forward together.

1. Shri Ram's Dynastic Lineage

According to Ramayana tradition, Shri Ram is born in the Ikshvaku dynasty. This dynasty is also renowned, in Indian tradition, by the name of the Solar dynasty.

Ikshvaku is regarded as the son of Vaivasvata Manu, and Indian Puranic literature presents the dynastic tradition of many kings following Ikshvaku.

This very royal tradition proceeds forward through Raghu, Aja, and Maharaja Dasharatha.

For this reason, Shri Ram is also addressed by names such as Raghuvanshi, Raghava, Ikshvakuvanshi, and Suryavanshi.

It must be made clear here that differences may be found in the details of the genealogy across different texts. Therefore, wherever any genealogy is mentioned in this book, its specific textual source will be kept in view.

2. The Sons of Maharaja Dasharatha

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Maharaja Dasharatha had four sons – Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, and Shatrughna.

Ram's birth is described as being from Kausalya, Bharat's from Kaikeyi, and Lakshman's and Shatrughna's from Sumitra.

All four princes were raised in the royal family of Ayodhya.

Ram was the eldest. His place in the dynastic tradition was, therefore, special.

But the reason for his importance in the Ramayana is not merely that he was the eldest son. The narrative brings forward such qualities in his personality that he came to be established, later, as the ideal son, ideal brother, ideal husband, ideal king, and a man devoted to dharma.

3. The Birth of Ram

The birth of Ram is presented in the Ramayana as an extremely important event.

Desiring offspring, Dasharatha has the Putrakameshti Yajna performed. After the yajna, an account is found of his receiving divine payasam and distributing it among his queens.

Thereafter follows the account of the birth of Ram from the womb of Kausalya, Bharat from the womb of Kaikeyi, and Lakshman and Shatrughna from the womb of Sumitra.

An atmosphere of joy is created in Ayodhya by the birth of Ram.

In religious tradition, Ram's birth is connected with the ninth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra, which is celebrated today as Ram Navami.

This festival is celebrated with devotion by devotees of Ram not only in India, but in many parts of the world.

4. The Religious Importance of Ram's Birth

In Vaishnav tradition, Shri Ram is accepted as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

This concept develops in particular detail in the Puranas and in later Vaishnav religious traditions.

Elements relating to Ram's divine nature are found in the Valmiki Ramayana as well, but his human aspect is extremely important in the presentation of Ram's character.

He is a son. He is a brother. He is a husband. He is a prince. He is a forest-dweller. He is a warrior. And, ultimately, he is a king.

For this reason, the power of the Ram narrative is visible not merely in his divine nature, but also in his human life-struggle.

5. Ram's Childhood

In Ayodhya, all four princes were raised according to the tradition of the royal family.

The princes received not merely instruction in the scriptures, but also training in the various branches of learning and the skill of warfare necessary for a prince.

In ancient Indian royal tradition, the purpose of a prince's education was not merely to become learned. He had, in future, to bear the responsibility of the kingdom.

It was, therefore, regarded as necessary to develop in him qualities such as knowledge of the scriptures, statecraft, dharma, skill in warfare, self-restraint, and responsibility toward his subjects.

A particular expression of these qualities is seen, later, in Ram's character.

6. The Role of Guru Vashishtha

The role of the great sage Vashishtha in the education of the princes was important.

Vashishtha was Dasharatha's family preceptor and royal priest. His place in the rites and educational tradition of the royal family was special.

The relationship between guru and disciple is presented, in the Ramayana, in an extremely respectful form.

Ram is humble toward his teachers. He receives knowledge not as an entitlement, but as a responsibility.

This quality is visible throughout his life, going forward.

7. The Special Bond between Ram and Lakshman

There was love among all four brothers, but the relationship between Ram and Lakshman appears particularly deep.

Lakshman is extremely devoted to Ram.

When Vishwamitra comes to Dasharatha to take Ram with him, Lakshman, too, prepares to go with Ram.

Later, during the exile as well, Lakshman does not leave Ram's side.

This establishes, in the Ramayana, an extremely influential ideal of brotherly love.

8. Vishwamitra's Arrival in Ayodhya

The next important stage of Ram's life comes when the great sage Vishwamitra reaches Ayodhya.

Vishwamitra requests Dasharatha to send Ram with him, so that he may protect his yajna.

Dasharatha becomes anxious for his son Ram.

Ram is still young in age, and Dasharatha does not wish to place him in any danger.

But after Vishwamitra's entreaty and Vashishtha's counsel, Ram prepares to go with him.

This very event becomes the first important stage of Ram's emergence from the royal palace into the wider world.

9. Ram and Vishwamitra

Ram and Lakshman's departure with Vishwamitra was a decisive change in Ram's life.

Until then, Ram had been receiving his education in the royal palace.

Now, he begins to become acquainted with the forest, hermitages, and various sage traditions.

Vishwamitra imparts to him knowledge of many branches of learning and of weapons – such is the account found in the Ramayana.

From this point, Ram's personality develops not merely as that of a prince, but as that of a warrior who protects dharma and the tradition of the sages.

10. The Slaying of Tadaka

During the journey with Vishwamitra, Ram encounters Tadaka.

Vishwamitra orders Ram to slay Tadaka.

Ram initially hesitates in this matter, because Tadaka is a woman. But Vishwamitra explains to him that, where necessary for the protection of the kingdom and dharma, the suppression of an evil power is the duty of a prince.

Ram ultimately slays Tadaka.

This episode is an example, in Ram's life, of a decision made between duty and personal hesitation.

This, too, is part of the narrative of the Ramayana and should be presented within that same source-context.

11. The Protection of the Yajna

Vishwamitra's yajna was being disrupted by demonic powers.

Ram and Lakshman reach there and protect the yajna.

Ram encounters Maricha and Subahu.

Ram demonstrates his skill in warfare and helps in the completion of Vishwamitra's yajna.

This event becomes the first great public responsibility of Ram's life.

He is no longer merely Dasharatha's son. He begins to be established as a prince who protects dharma and the sages.

12. The Journey Toward Mithila

After protecting the yajna, Vishwamitra takes Ram and Lakshman toward Mithila.

Ram is present at an important gathering organized by King Janaka of Mithila.

It is here that the next great event of Ram's life occurs – his marriage to Sita.

But before the marriage comes the episode of Shiva's bow.

This episode is extremely important in the narrative of the Ramayana, and will be studied in detail in the Part that follows.

13. The Early Characteristics of Ram's Personality

From the early episodes of childhood and youth, several characteristics of Ram's personality come to the fore.

Humility – he holds his teachers and parents in respect.

Obedience – he gives importance to the commands of his father and his guru.

Valour – when necessary, he does not shrink from battle.

Self-restraint – his conduct remains disciplined according to circumstance.

Devotion to duty – he gives greater importance to his duty than to personal happiness.

These very qualities form the foundation for Ram's establishment, in Indian culture, as Maryada Purushottam.

14. The Balance between History and Faith

The greatest challenge in researching the life of Shri Ram is precisely this – that Ram, in Indian religious consciousness, is not merely a historical or literary character. He is at the centre of the faith of hundreds of millions of people.

In this treatise, therefore, we shall keep two matters distinct.

From a religious standpoint, Shri Ram is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

From a historical-literary standpoint, the principal ancient source of the Ram narrative is the Valmiki Ramayana, on the basis of which the study of Ram's life, character, and the tradition of Ayodhya is undertaken.

There is no need to set these two perspectives against one another.

The purpose of research is not to refute faith, but to understand the available sources honestly.

Conclusion

Shri Ram's life begins in the royal palace of Ayodhya, but his personality soon extends beyond the boundaries of the palace.

Birth in the Ikshvaku dynasty, upbringing as the eldest son of Dasharatha, education from his teachers, departure for the forest with Vishwamitra, and the protection of the sages – all these events play an important role in the formation of his personality.

The greatest characteristic of Ram's life is that propriety is joined with his power, and duty is joined with his authority.

In the Part that follows, we shall undertake a detailed study of Mithila, King Janaka, the introduction of Sita, Shiva's bow, the marriage of Ram and Sita, and the marriages of all four brothers.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda

3. Vishnu Purana – tradition relating to the Solar dynasty and Shri Ram

4. Bhagavata Purana – account relating to the Ram avatar and the Solar dynasty

5. Indian Ramayana tradition and Vaishnav literature

– End of Chapter 7, Part 1 –

Part 2: Mithila, King Janaka, Sita, and the Marriage of Shri Ram and Sita

1. The Journey from Ayodhya to Mithila

When Shri Ram and Lakshman set out toward Mithila with the great sage Vishwamitra, a new chapter of Ram's life begins. The prince, raised in the royal palace of Ayodhya, was now becoming acquainted with various hermitages, forest regions, and other royal centres.

Mithila is described, in the Ramayana, as the kingdom of King Janaka at that time. Janaka is established not merely as a king, but as a ruler devoted to dharma, who honoured scholars and sages.

The tradition of Mithila later became deeply connected with Indian philosophy and spiritual thought as well. In particular, Janaka received respect in Indian literature as an ideal king connected with knowledge and renunciation.

2. An Introduction to King Janaka

In the Ramayana, King Janaka's full name is given as Sirdhvaja Janaka. He was the king of Mithila, and, as the father of Sita, he holds a special place in the Ram narrative.

In Indian tradition, 'Janaka' is found not merely as the name of one person, but also as a royal title used for the kings of Mithila.

It is therefore necessary, when the name 'Janaka' occurs in various texts, to examine its context.

The Janaka of the Ramayana is a father who holds extremely deep affection for his daughter Sita, but who also gives importance to dharma and to his pledged word.

3. An Introduction to Sita

Sita's place in the life of Shri Ram is extremely important.

According to the tradition of the Valmiki Ramayana, Sita was obtained by King Janaka from the earth, and for this reason she received names such as Bhumija, Janaki, and Maithili.

The word 'Sita' is connected with the furrow made by drawing a plough through the earth in agriculture. The account of Sita's birth, therefore, also carries a symbolic meaning connected with land and agricultural culture.

In religious tradition, Sita is regarded as an incarnation of Mother Lakshmi, and Shri Ram as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Thus, the relationship of Ram and Sita is understood, in Vaishnav religious tradition, not merely as that of husband and wife, but also as the divine relationship of Vishnu and Lakshmi.

4. Sita's Personality

In the Ramayana, Sita is not presented merely as the daughter of King Janaka.

Qualities such as firmness, self-respect, courage, a sense of duty, devotion to her husband, and patience in difficult circumstances are visible in her personality.

In later episodes, when Ram goes to the forest, Sita herself decides to go to the forest. This decision, too, brings forward her independent resolve and firm personality.

The study of the Ram narrative is, therefore, not complete through Ram alone. Sita's character is an equally important foundation of the moral and cultural structure of the Ram narrative.

5. The Episode of Shiva's Bow

The most celebrated episode of the assembly organized by King Janaka in Mithila is connected with Lord Shiva's bow.

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, King Janaka possessed the great bow of Shiva. Janaka had made a pledge that the valiant person capable of lifting that bow and stringing it would be married to Sita.

This pledge forms the principal foundation of the narrative of Sita's swayamvara.

Here we find a literary portrayal of the relationship between marriage, valour, and royal prestige in ancient royal families.

6. The Attempts of Many Kings

According to the narrative of the Ramayana, many kings and princes attempt to lift Shiva's bow, but they do not succeed.

This creates an atmosphere of the bow's extraordinary power and the challenge before the kings present at the assembly.

Ultimately, the great sage Vishwamitra permits Ram to approach the bow.

Ram advances, obeying his guru's command.

7. Shri Ram Lifting the Bow

Ram lifts Shiva's bow and attempts to string it.

According to the Ramayana, the bow breaks in this very attempt.

Astonishment spreads through the entire assembly at the sound of the bow breaking.

King Janaka's pledge is fulfilled, and a worthy bridegroom is found for Sita.

This episode is extremely important in Ram's life, for it is here that, for the first time, he demonstrates his extraordinary power at a great royal occasion.

But it is worth noting that Ram does not himself display this achievement. He acts on the command of his guru.

This is precisely an important characteristic of his personality – humility joined with power.

8. The Marriage of Ram and Sita

After the episode of Shiva's bow, King Janaka agrees to the marriage of Ram and Sita.

Maharaja Dasharatha and the royal family are summoned from Ayodhya to Mithila.

The marriage of Ram and Sita takes place.

This marriage became a principal symbol of ideal marital life in Indian culture.

The relationship of Ram and Sita is not shown as based on personal love alone. Dharma, duty, family, and social responsibility are also connected with it.

9. The Marriages of All Four Brothers

In Mithila, it is not only the marriage of Ram and Sita that takes place.

According to Ramayana tradition, all four brothers are married into the royal family connected with Janaka.

Ram – Sita.

Lakshman – Urmila.

Bharat – Mandavi.

Shatrughna – Shrutakirti.

In this way, a family relationship is established between the royal dynasties of Ayodhya and Mithila.

This marriage can also be regarded, from a political standpoint, as a symbol of the relationship between two esteemed royal traditions, although the Ramayana presents chiefly its religious and family aspect.

10. The Return to Ayodhya

After the marriage, Ram and his brothers return to Ayodhya with their respective wives.

An atmosphere of joy fills Ayodhya.

Ram is no longer merely a prince. He is a married prince, and his place as the future successor appears still stronger.

This period was also extremely joyful for Dasharatha. He obtains the joy of his sons' marriages and the prosperity of his family.

But the narrative of the Ramayana was about to take a new turn ahead.

11. The Arrival of Parashurama

On the way back to Ayodhya, another important episode occurs in Ram's life – the encounter between Parashurama and Ram.

According to the Ramayana, after Shiva's bow breaks, Parashurama arrives, extremely angry.

He presents Ram with another divine bow and tests his power with it.

Ram demonstrates his capability with that bow as well.

This episode further establishes Ram's valour.

At the same time, this narrative signals an important transition in Ram's life – the rise of a new ideal following the valour of an older age.

12. The Expansion of Ram's Personality

The episodes of Mithila bring forward many new aspects of Ram's personality.

Valour – the episode of Shiva's bow shows Ram's extraordinary power.

Humility – he does not display his power himself; he acts on his guru's command.

Propriety – in marriage and family relationships, he observes traditional propriety.

Devotion to dharma – he accepts the role of guru, father, and dharma in every important act.

Restraint – despite possessing extraordinary power, his conduct is not arrogant.

These very qualities become still clearer in the episodes of the exile and the victory at Lanka that follow.

13. The Cultural Importance of the Ram-Sita Relationship

Ram and Sita became symbols of ideal married life within the Indian family system.

In Ram's life, Sita is not merely a wife. She becomes a sharer in the joys and sorrows of his life.

Sita's going with Ram to the forest, later, deepens this relationship still further.

But here, too, we must exercise caution, for the interpretation of the characters and events of Ram and Sita is found in different forms across various later Ramayana traditions.

Wherever necessary, therefore, we shall present the Valmiki Ramayana and later regional/religious Ramayanas separately.

14. History and Tradition

The traditions relating to Mithila, Janaka, Sita, and the marriage of Ram are extremely ancient and widespread in the cultural memory of India.

Today, many places in the Mithila region are believed to be connected with the tradition of the marriage of Ram and Sita. The religious tradition of Janakpur is particularly connected with the marriage of Ram and Sita.

But before treating any site directly as archaeological proof of an event of the Ramayana period, a review of independent archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence is necessary.

We shall, therefore, present traditional sites respectfully in this book, but shall not place tradition and archaeological evidence in the same category.

15. A Research Conclusion

The Mithila chapter of Ram's life is important at several levels.

Here, Ram moves beyond being a prince of Ayodhya and becomes connected with a broader royal and cultural world.

Here, he meets Sita. Here, the character of a learned king such as Janaka comes to the fore. Here, Ram's valour is displayed.

And it is from here that the relationship between Ram and Sita is established, which cast a profound influence upon the literature, art, religion, and popular life of Indian civilization.

Conclusion

In this Part of Chapter 7, we have seen that Shri Ram's life was not confined to Ayodhya alone. The journey to Mithila gave a new direction to his life.

The episode of Shiva's bow at King Janaka's assembly, the marriage to Sita, and the return to Ayodhya – these events further clarify valour, humility, propriety, and family responsibility in Ram's personality.

The marriage of Ram and Sita becomes the foundation for the great events that follow.

In the Part that follows, we shall study, in detail, the preparations for Ram's coronation, Kaikeyi's boons, the exile, and the departure for the forest with Sita and Lakshman, as the next decisive stage of Shri Ram's life.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda, Ram's journey with Vishwamitra.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda, the episode of Mithila, Janaka, and Sita.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda, Shiva's bow and the marriage of Ram and Sita.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Bala Kanda, the dialogue between Parashurama and Ram.

5. Vishnu Purana and Bhagavata Purana, traditions relating to the Ram avatar and the Solar dynasty.

– End of Chapter 7, Part 2 –

Part 3: From Coronation to Exile – The Test of Word, Dharma, and Propriety

1. Preparations for Ram's Coronation in Ayodhya

After the marriage in Mithila, Shri Ram returned to Ayodhya. As time passed, Maharaja Dasharatha's age began to advance. He wished that the responsibility of the kingdom be entrusted to capable hands.

The Ayodhya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana describes Dasharatha's decision to make Ram the heir apparent. Ram's virtues, his popularity among his subjects, and his royal qualities are placed in the background of this decision.

Preparations for the coronation began in Ayodhya. There was an atmosphere of celebration in the city.

But the very occasion that was to be a day of joy for Ayodhya later became the greatest sacrifice of Ram's life.

2. The Love of the People of Ayodhya for Ram

The Ramayana describes the deep affection of the people of Ayodhya for Ram.

Ram was not regarded merely as the king's son. He was beloved of the citizens because of his own virtues and conduct.

Qualities such as humility, truthfulness, self-restraint, and respect toward his subjects are described in him.

It was, therefore, natural that when the announcement of his coronation was made, an atmosphere of joy arose in Ayodhya.

This episode brings forward an important aspect of Ram's personality – even before becoming king, Ram had already made a place in people's hearts.

3. Manthara's Intervention

Amid the preparations for the coronation, when Kaikeyi's maidservant Manthara learns of Ram's becoming heir apparent, she incites Kaikeyi.

Manthara explains to Kaikeyi that, if Ram becomes king, Bharat's royal future may be affected.

Kaikeyi had earlier held affection for Ram, but her mind gradually changes.

Here, the Ramayana portrays the crisis created within the royal family by the words of one person.

It is necessary here, from a research standpoint, to make clear that Manthara's character is part of the narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana. It cannot be used as the basis for the conclusion of an actual historical political conspiracy.

4. Kaikeyi's Two Boons

Kaikeyi recalls the two old boons earlier granted by Dasharatha.

She places two demands before Dasharatha –

1. That Bharat be made king of Ayodhya.

2. That Ram be given fourteen years of exile.

This was extremely painful for Dasharatha to hear.

He loved Ram deeply, and had himself made preparations for his coronation.

But Kaikeyi remains firm on her boons.

It is from this point that the greatest test of Ram's life begins.

5. The Crisis of Dharma before Ram

When Ram receives news of his exile, two paths lay before him.

On the one hand – the kingdom, the throne, and the right to Ayodhya.

On the other – his father's word and dharma.

Ram chose the second path.

He did not contend for royal power. He did not dispute with Kaikeyi. He did not even attempt to free Dasharatha from his word.

He accepted the decision to go to the forest.

It is this very moment that prepared the foundation for Ram's establishment, in Indian culture, as Maryada Purushottam.

6. Ram's Acceptance of the Exile

Ram accepted the exile not as a punishment, but as an opportunity to uphold his father's word.

His view was that the father had given his word, and it was the son's duty to uphold that word.

This decision of Ram became, in Indian thought, an ideal of filial devotion and adherence to dharma.

But viewing this episode from a modern standpoint, it should also be understood that this narrative developed within an ancient dynastic and religious system.

In today's political system, personal word and the constitutional rights of the state are determined in a different manner.

It would not, therefore, be proper to apply Ram's decision directly to a modern constitutional system.

7. Sita's Decision

When Sita receives news of Ram's departure for the forest, she herself decides to go with him.

Ram makes her aware of the hardships of forest life.

There will be no comforts like the royal palace in the forest. There will be difficult paths, wild creatures, and many kinds of hardship.

But Sita remains firm in her decision. She regards going to the forest with Ram as her duty.

In this episode, Sita's personality appears extremely firm.

She is not merely a character who accepts circumstances; she makes her own decision and accepts its consequences.

8. Lakshman's Sacrifice

On hearing that Ram and Sita are going to the forest, Lakshman, too, decides to go with them.

Lakshman's life could have passed in comfort in the royal palace. But he gave priority to going to the forest with his brother.

His decision became an ideal of brotherly devotion and service.

The departure of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman together, going forward, becomes the foundation of the principal narrative of the Ramayana.

9. Dasharatha's Helplessness

At the time of giving the order to send Ram to the forest, Dasharatha's condition is extremely sorrowful.

He wishes to stop Ram. He does not agree with Kaikeyi's decision.

But he faces the word he has given.

This is why Dasharatha's character comes to the fore not merely as that of a harsh king, but also as that of a helpless father.

This episode of the Ramayana presents, in an extremely powerful manner, the conflict between human emotion and rajadharma.

10. The Departure from Ayodhya

When Ram, Sita, and Lakshman leave Ayodhya, an atmosphere of grief arises in the city.

The Ramayana gives a poignant description of the citizens following after them.

This scene does not show merely the sorrow of the royal family. It also brings forward the relationship established between Ram and the subjects of Ayodhya.

The very prince for whose coronation the city had been decorated now had to be bid farewell to the forest.

11. From Royal Garments to a Forest-Dweller's Life

In the episode of the departure for the forest, a great change comes over the lives of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman.

The splendour of the royal palace is left behind. The life of the forest lies ahead.

Ram accepts this change.

This episode further clarifies sacrifice and self-restraint in Ram's personality.

For him, being a prince was not the ultimate foundation of his identity. His true identity was connected with his dharma and his duty.

12. Meeting Nishadaraja Guha

After moving on from Ayodhya, Ram meets Nishadaraja Guha.

Guha holds deep reverence and affection for Ram.

This episode is also important from the standpoint of social relationships in the Ram narrative.

Ram's connection is not confined to kings and sages alone. He also establishes contact with communities living in the forest region and with various social groups.

The friendship of Guha and Ram received particular respect in later traditions of the Ram narrative.

13. Crossing the Ganga

Ram, Sita, and Lakshman reach the bank of the Ganga.

With the help of Nishadaraja Guha, they cross the Ganga.

Thereafter, they proceed toward the hermitage of the sage Bharadwaja.

This journey marks the beginning of a stage entirely separate from Ram's royal life.

Ram is now no longer a prince of Ayodhya, but a forest-dweller.

14. Toward Chitrakuta

From the hermitage of the sage Bharadwaja, Ram, Sita, and Lakshman proceed toward Chitrakuta.

Chitrakuta, going forward, becomes an extremely important site of the Ramayana tradition.

It is here that Ram, Sita, and Lakshman dwell during the early days of the exile.

Chitrakuta is not merely a centre of religious faith; it is also an important cultural site in the memory of the Ram narrative.

Later in this book, when the sites of the Ramayana period connected with Ayodhya are studied, tradition, literary mention, and available archaeological evidence will be discussed separately.

15. Exile: From Prince to Popular Leader

Ram's exile is not merely the event of leaving the royal palace.

This is the very period in which Ram's connection is established with the vast world beyond Ayodhya.

His contact with sages, forest-dwelling communities, Nishadas, vanaras, and various kings, going forward, forms the broad structure of the Ram narrative.

During the exile, Ram's personality becomes increasingly broad.

He is no longer merely a prince of Ayodhya. He comes to the fore as a leader who establishes relationships among various communities and contends against injustice.

16. The Expansion of Ram's Ideal

In this episode of the departure for the forest, several important ideals of Ram's personality are visible –

Dharma – duty above personal right.

Sacrifice – the renunciation of the kingdom and royal comforts.

Filial devotion – regarding his father's word as supreme.

Marital devotion – accepting difficult circumstances together with Sita.

Brotherly love – a deep bond with Lakshman.

Humility – despite being a prince, affectionate conduct toward forest-dwellers and sages.

Because of these qualities, Ram became, in Indian culture, not merely a victorious hero, but an ideal of propriety and duty.

17. A Necessary Caution from a Historical Standpoint

The events of Ram's exile are extremely important in Indian religious and cultural tradition.

But from a research standpoint, we must make clear that the Valmiki Ramayana is the principal literary source of these events.

Beyond this, an extension of these events is found in many later Ramayanas and regional traditions.

Local belief alone cannot be regarded as sufficient to connect a place with Ram's exile. This requires a separate review of literary, archaeological, and historical evidence.

It is this very method that will carry our book forward, from emotional description to a research treatise.

Conclusion

The departure from Ayodhya for the forest is among the most decisive turning points in Shri Ram's life.

On the one hand lay preparations for the coronation. On the other, fourteen years of exile came to the fore.

Ram did not choose the kingdom – he chose dharma.

Sita did not choose comfort – she chose companionship.

Lakshman did not choose royal life – he chose service.

And Ayodhya lost its beloved prince.

It is from this point that the Ram narrative crosses the boundary of the royal palace and becomes the broad cultural journey of India.

In the Part that follows, we shall study Chitrakuta, Bharat's arrival in the forest, the dialogue between Ram and Bharat, the sandals, and the political and moral meaning of Ram's exile.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Ram's departure for the forest and his going with Sita and Lakshman

3. Valmiki Ramayana – episodes relating to Nishadaraja Guha, the hermitage of Bharadwaja, and Chitrakuta

4. Vishnu Purana – tradition relating to Shri Ram and the Solar dynasty

5. Bhagavata Purana – account relating to the Ram avatar

Part 4: Chitrakuta, the Meeting with Bharat, and Ram's Sandals – Sacrifice, Brotherly Dharma, and Rajadharma

1. Ram's Residence at Chitrakuta

After the departure from Ayodhya for the forest, Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman reached Chitrakuta. According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Ram liked the natural environment of Chitrakuta, and he decided to reside there.

Chitrakuta is not merely a place of exile in the Ram narrative. It becomes the land where one of the most important moral dialogues connected with Ram, Bharat, and the sovereignty of Ayodhya takes place.

Here, Ram is far from the royal palace, but the question of Ayodhya's politics and rajadharma still lies before him.

2. Bharat's Situation in Ayodhya

On the other side, when Bharat receives the full news of Ram's exile and Dasharatha's death, he is extremely grieved.

Bharat does not accept his mother Kaikeyi's decision.

The kingdom lay before him, but he does not regard it as his right.

His thought was – how could he himself accept a kingdom whose true right belonged to Ram?

Here, Bharat's character comes to the fore as an extraordinary example, in Indian tradition, of the renunciation of power and brotherly devotion.

3. Bharat's Departure toward Chitrakuta

Bharat decides to go to Chitrakuta in order to bring Ram back.

With him go elders, members of the royal family, ministers, and many people of Ayodhya.

This journey was not merely a family reunion.

Bharat's purpose was clear – to bring Ram back to Ayodhya and to entrust him with his kingdom.

In this episode, an important aspect of the governance system of Ayodhya is visible. The question of the kingdom was not merely a private matter of the royal family; the participation of the guru, ministers, and subjects is also visible in it.

4. The Meeting of Ram and Bharat

The meeting of Ram and Bharat at Chitrakuta is among the most emotionally profound episodes of the Ramayana.

Bharat is grieved on seeing Ram and entreats him to return to Ayodhya.

Ram, too, loves Bharat, but he does not go back on his decision.

Before him lies his father's word.

Dasharatha is no longer alive, but for Ram, the word he gave is still a matter of dharma.

Ram's argument is clear – it is the son's duty to fulfil the word given by the father.

5. Bharat's Entreaty

Bharat tells Ram that Dasharatha is no more, and that circumstances have changed.

He wishes that Ram complete his exile and return to Ayodhya.

Bharat's view, too, is grounded in dharma.

For him, Ram alone is the eldest son and the rightful king.

Thus, two different interpretations of dharma appear before the two brothers.

For Ram – his father's word is supreme.

For Bharat – Ram is the rightful successor to the kingdom.

Neither wishes to step back from his own duty.

6. Ram's Answer

Ram explains to Bharat that fulfilling his father's word is the proper course.

He says that if a son breaks his father's word, the propriety of the royal dynasty and the standing of truth will be affected.

For Ram, the exile is not a personal punishment. It is a responsibility he has already accepted.

Here, Ram's personality establishes an important principle –

Duty before right.

Ram has a right to the kingdom, but he does not wish to use his right against dharma.

7. Bharat's Refusal of Royal Power

Bharat does not agree with Ram's decision, but ultimately he respects Ram's pledge.

He himself is not prepared to become king.

It is here that the greatest characteristic of Bharat's character comes to the fore.

He had the opportunity to obtain power, but he did not accept power for himself.

This episode became, in Indian tradition, an ideal of renunciatory leadership.

8. The Episode of the Sandals

Bharat requests Ram to give him his sandals.

Ram gives his sandals to Bharat.

Bharat takes those sandals to Ayodhya.

In Ram's absence, the sandals become a symbol of his royal legitimacy and presence.

This episode is among the most distinctive political-cultural concepts of the Ramayana.

Ram himself is not present in Ayodhya, but his dharma and his right remain symbolically present through the sandals.

9. Bharat's Residence at Nandigram

Bharat takes Ram's sandals and returns to Ayodhya.

According to Ramayana tradition, Bharat dwells at Nandigram, awaiting Ram's return.

He keeps his distance from royal comforts and conducts his life within an ascetic-like propriety.

This episode strengthens the idea that Bharat did not regard the kingdom as personal property.

For him, the kingdom was Ram's trust and the people's responsibility.

10. The Sandals as a Symbol of Royal Power

The placing of Ram's sandals upon the throne became an extremely powerful symbol in Indian cultural memory.

This does not mean that the sandals themselves conducted the administration.

The actual administration ran through Bharat and the royal system.

The sandals were a symbol of the king's legitimacy and right.

This distinction is important from a research standpoint.

While honouring the religious symbol, we shall keep administrative reality and symbolic meaning distinct.

11. Ram and Bharat: Two Perspectives on Power

Viewing the characters of Ram and Bharat together, two important ideals of royal power come to the fore.

Ram – though entitled to power, he renounces power.

Bharat – though in a position to obtain power, he does not accept it.

Thus, the lives of both brothers convey a single message –

Royal power exists not for a person's own happiness, but for dharma and the subjects.

This very idea, going forward, became the foundation of the vision of ideal governance in Indian political and religious literature.

12. The Death of Dasharatha and the Dharma of the Sons

The death of Dasharatha made this entire crisis still more severe.

Had Dasharatha been alive, a resolution of the dispute arising between Ram, Bharat, and Ayodhya might have been possible before him.

But now, both brothers had themselves to determine the path of dharma.

Ram accepted his father's pledge.

Bharat accepted Ram's legitimacy.

Thus, even after Dasharatha's death, both the father's propriety and the royal dynasty's tradition remain alive in the decisions of the two brothers.

13. The Cultural Importance of Chitrakuta

Chitrakuta is regarded, even today, as among the principal pilgrimage sites connected with the Ram narrative.

In local religious tradition, many sites there are said to be connected with the exile of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman.

But in this book, a clear research method will be adopted.

Regarding any place, we shall record three matters separately –

textual mention; local religious tradition; archaeological or historical evidence.

This will enable the reader to understand, for themselves, from what kind of source each matter is drawn.

14. The Broader Meaning of Ram's Exile

Ram's exile gradually ceases to be merely the event of remaining away from Ayodhya.

During the exile, he comes into contact with many sages, forest-dwelling communities, kings, and various regions.

Later, this same journey takes him toward South India and Lanka.

From this standpoint, Ram's exile becomes the foundation of a vast narrative of Indian cultural geography.

Through the Ram narrative, many places, from Ayodhya in the north to the south and to Lanka, became connected with Indian cultural memory.

But separate evidence will be required to connect all these sites directly and historically with Ram's life.

15. Sacrifice in Ram's Character

The episode at Chitrakuta further clarifies Ram's sacrifice.

Ram had the right to obtain the kingdom. Bharat himself was prepared to give him the kingdom. The subjects of Ayodhya, too, wanted him.

Even so, Ram decided to complete the fourteen years of exile.

This decision brings forward the fundamental principle of his character –

Dharma is greater than convenience.

Ram chose the difficult path because it seemed to him to accord with his duty.

16. Selflessness in Bharat's Character

Bharat's sacrifice, too, is equally important.

He knew that circumstances could make him king.

But he did not turn this opportunity to his own advantage.

Placing Ram's sandals upon the throne, he regarded himself merely as the guardian of the kingdom.

For this reason, Bharat became, in Indian tradition, a symbol of selfless service and brotherly devotion.

17. An Assessment from a Modern Political Standpoint

Caution is necessary when reading the episode of Ram and Bharat in the context of modern politics.

Today, the state is run by constitution, law, and institutions.

The system of ancient Ayodhya was based on monarchy.

It would not, therefore, be historically proper to call the decisions of Ram and Bharat a direct model of modern democratic governance.

But universal ideas such as moral leadership, restraint with respect to power, duty, and public responsibility can certainly be drawn from these episodes.

18. A Research Note

The narrative of the meeting of Ram and Bharat is extremely ancient and influential in Indian culture.

Its principal literary foundation is the Valmiki Ramayana. Later, Ramayanas of various languages and regions extended it within their own cultural contexts.

For this reason, when we later study Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, the Kamba Ramayanam, the Krittivasi Ramayana, and other regional traditions, their descriptions will be kept as sources separate from the Valmiki Ramayana.

This method is necessary to maintain the research-based reliability of the book.

Conclusion

The meeting of Ram and Bharat at Chitrakuta is among the most profound moral episodes of the Ramayana.

Ram said – the protection of word and dharma is necessary.

Bharat said – the kingdom belongs to Ram.

Ram did not accept the kingdom.

Bharat did not regard the kingdom as his own.

Ultimately, Ram's sandals returned to Ayodhya, and Bharat took up the responsibility of the kingdom while awaiting Ram's return.

Thus, the episode at Chitrakuta is not merely the meeting of two brothers.

It is a remarkable confluence of dharma, sacrifice, legitimacy, power, and duty.

In the Part that follows, we shall study the further stage of Ram's exile – the hermitages of sages, Dandakaranya, contact with forest-dwelling communities, the slaying of demons, and the broad social-cultural aspect of Ram's forest life.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, Chitrakuta and the dialogue between Ram and Bharat.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, the episode of Bharat receiving Ram's sandals.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Ayodhya Kanda, Bharat's return to Ayodhya.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the further episodes of Ram's forest life.

5. Various Indian regional and religious traditions of the Ramayana.

– End of Chapter 7, Part 4 –

Part 5: The Journey to Dandakaranya, Hermitages of Sages, and Forest Life

After the meeting with Bharat at Chitrakuta, Shri Ram's exile did not come to an end. In accordance with his father's word, he resolved to complete the fourteen years. Now, the next stage of his life takes him far from the royal bounds of Ayodhya, into extensive forest regions and to many hermitages of sages.

This stage is important because here Ram's contact is not merely with the royal family and kings, but with sages, ascetics, and various communities dwelling in the forest region.

1. Beyond Chitrakuta

After residing for some time at Chitrakuta, Ram, Sita, and Lakshman proceed onward into the forest. A detailed account of their forest life is found in the Aranya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana.

Forest life was entirely different from the life of the royal palace.

There was no throne, no royal protection, no splendour of a palace.

In their place were forests, hermitages, rivers, mountains, wild creatures, the places of austerity of sages, and many kinds of difficult circumstances.

Ram accepts this life and is not deterred from the purpose of his exile.

2. The Hermitages of Sages

During the exile, Ram visits the hermitages of many sages and ascetics.

The sages tell Ram of their difficulties and expect the ascetics dwelling in the forest to be protected.

Here, a new responsibility comes before Ram.

He is no longer merely a person protecting his own family. Protection is now also expected of him for the people living in the forest.

Thus, the exile becomes, for him, a stage of moving from personal austerity toward public duty.

3. The Question of the Protection of Sages

In the Ramayana, many sages of Dandakaranya complain of being harassed by demons.

They seek Ram's help. Ram assures them of protection.

Here, his responsibility as a prince comes to the fore in a new form.

Despite being outside Ayodhya, Ram does not regard himself as separate from the protection of dharma and justice.

His view is that, wherever the weak suffer from injustice and violence, it is the duty of a kshatriya to protect them.

4. Sita's Important Role

In this very context, Sita's character, too, becomes important.

While dwelling in the forest, Sita cautions Ram regarding dharma and violence.

She wishes that Ram not take up weapons against anyone without necessity.

This dialogue is extremely important in the Ram narrative, for here we see, between husband and wife, not merely an emotional bond, but also deliberation on dharma and duty.

This aspect of Sita brings forward her independent reflection.

5. Ram's Kshatriya Dharma

Ram views the circumstances before him from the standpoint of kshatriya dharma.

For him, bearing arms is not merely a display of power.

If an innocent person or a sage is being oppressed, it is his responsibility to protect them.

Here, an important aspect of Ram's personality comes to the fore –

The use of power for protection.

This ideal remained important in later Indian rajadharma tradition as well.

6. The Cultural Importance of Dandakaranya

The mention of Dandakaranya is found, in Ramayana tradition, as a vast forest region.

It would not be proper, in modern geography, to equate 'Dandakaranya' with any single present-day district or state.

In later traditions, many regions of Central and South India were connected with Ram's exile.

For this reason, in discussing Dandakaranya in this book, it is necessary to keep the literary description and modern geographical identification distinct.

7. The Exile and the Cultural Geography of India

Ram's forest journey connected many regions with the Ram narrative in Indian cultural memory.

The narrative, beginning in the north with Ayodhya, proceeds onward to Central India, Dandakaranya, South India, and, ultimately, to Lanka.

This is why many local traditions relating to Ram are found in different states of India.

In one place there is the memory of Ram's exile, in another, sites connected with Sita, in another, traditions relating to Lakshman, and in another, religious beliefs connected with Ram's route.

All these traditions carry cultural importance.

But independent evidence is necessary to establish each site historically.

8. Ram and Forest-Dwelling Society

In the Ramayana, Ram's contact is with various communities living in the forest.

Nishadaraja Guha is an early example of this.

Later, the important role of forest-dwelling and vanara communities is visible in the Ram narrative.

Caution is necessary here – it would not be proper to directly equate the social and ethnic terms used in ancient texts with modern communities.

Establishing the modern identity of an ancient term requires linguistic, historical, and cultural evidence.

9. Ram's Social Conduct

An important characteristic of Ram's character is that he appears to value a person not by birth or social status, but by conduct and loyalty.

His affection for Nishadaraja Guha is an example of this.

His relationships, going forward, with various characters such as Shabari, Sugriva, Hanuman, and Vibhishana broaden the Ram narrative still further.

Different scholars may hold different views on the social identity and historical background of these characters.

Therefore, wherever disagreement exists, the book will present the available views clearly, rather than presenting one view as final truth.

10. Ram and Shabari

The episode of Shabari occurs in the Aranya Kanda of the Ramayana.

Shabari dwells for a long time at the hermitage, awaiting her guru, and welcomes Ram on his arrival.

Ram accepts her love and devotion.

In later devotional traditions, Shabari's character became extremely popular, and she was regarded as a symbol of unfeigned devotion.

Shabari's narrative made a special place for itself in Indian popular devotional tradition.

11. The Cultural Message of the Shabari Episode

The importance of Shabari's narrative is not merely that of a personal event.

Devotional tradition accepted it as conveying the message that love for God does not require external splendour.

True reverence and unfeigned feeling are given importance.

This episode received wide extension in later saint traditions and folk tales.

Here, too, we should keep the distinction between the original Valmiki Ramayana and later devotional narratives.

12. Ram's Exile: A Social Experience

Ram's exile was not merely a journey of hardships. It was also a kind of broad social experience.

The prince who had lived in the royal palace, during his exile, saw the life of sages, saw the conditions of the forest regions, made contact with various communities, spent his life amid nature, and confronted circumstances of injustice and conflict.

This experience, going forward, further broadened his personality.

13. Ram and Nature

The Ramayana contains detailed descriptions of forests, mountains, rivers, and trees.

Ram, Sita, and Lakshman spend their life amid nature.

From this standpoint, the Ram narrative is also visible among those ancient traditions of Indian literature in which the relationship between man and nature is important.

The forest, for Ram, is not merely a place of residence. It is also a domain of the test, practice, and experience of his life.

14. Exile and Rajadharma

It is an important question how Ram remains connected with rajadharma even while dwelling in the forest.

The answer is visible in his conduct.

He protects the weak. He listens to the problems of sages. He confronts injustice. He does not place his personal sorrow above his duty.

Thus, the exile did not end his rajadharma; rather, it gave it a broader form.

15. An Explanation of the Term 'Rakshasa'

The word 'rakshasa' (demon) is used, in the Ramayana, for many characters.

In religious tradition, rakshasas have generally been viewed as anti-divine or violent powers.

But in modern historical study, it would not be proper to treat this word as directly synonymous with any present-day human community.

This is an important research caution.

We shall present the word 'rakshasa', wherever it occurs in the text, in that same context, and shall not draw any improper conclusion regarding modern ethnic or social groups.

16. The Next Decisive Stage of the Exile

Ram's life at Dandakaranya gradually leads him toward the events that go on to become the most celebrated events of the Ramayana.

Further on, he encounters Khara, Dushana, Shurpanakha, and other characters.

After this, events change rapidly.

The stage is set for the abduction of Sita, and Ram's journey enters a new phase.

But before that comes the episode of Panchavati.

17. Toward Panchavati

Ram, Sita, and Lakshman ultimately decide to dwell in the region of Panchavati.

This region, situated near the river Godavari, holds particular importance in Ramayana tradition.

It is from here that the character of the Ram narrative changes rapidly.

Until now, Ram's exile had been connected chiefly with sages and forest life.

After entering Panchavati, events lead him toward the conflict connected with demons and Lanka.

18. Panchavati from a Research Standpoint

Today, Panchavati is connected with the Ramayana in the Nashik region of Maharashtra, and many religious sites there are said to be connected with the tradition of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman.

But to treat any modern site directly and definitely as identical with the place described in the Valmiki Ramayana, a separate review of literary and archaeological evidence is necessary.

In our book, therefore, the meanings of the phrases 'held in tradition' and 'archaeologically proven' will be kept distinct.

19. A New Stage of Ram's Personality

From the episodes of Dandakaranya and Panchavati, a new aspect of Ram's personality comes to the fore.

He is now no longer merely son, husband, and brother.

He comes to the fore as the protector of sages, a participant in forest life, and a warrior contending against injustice.

Further on, after the abduction of Sita, his character will take an even broader form.

Conclusion

The exile at Dandakaranya is an extremely important stage of Shri Ram's life.

Going far from the royal palace, he saw, at close hand, the life of sages, ascetics, and forest regions. In the crises before him, he gave priority to dharma and duty.

The most important message of this stage is –

True leadership develops not merely by sitting upon a throne, but by understanding the difficult regions of society.

Ram's exile carries him beyond being a prince of Ayodhya, in the direction of a popular leader connected with many cultural traditions of India.

His journey toward Panchavati now carries the Ram narrative toward a decisive turning point.

In the Part that follows, we shall undertake a systematic study of Panchavati, Shurpanakha, the episode of Khara-Dushana, the background to the abduction of Sita, and the political-cultural context of the Ramayana.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Dandakaranya and the episode of the hermitages of sages.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – the episode of Shabari.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Ram's departure toward Panchavati.

5. Various Indian regional and devotional traditions of the Ramayana.

– End of Chapter 7, Part 5 –

Part 6: Panchavati, Shurpanakha, Khara-Dushana, and the Background to the Abduction of Sita

Our Research Method

The permanent research method of this treatise is based on the following principles. Even a small error can call into question the reliability of the entire work; where facts are not certain, definite language will therefore not be used.

Primary sources will be given primary standing.

Where the views of two or more historians differ, both views will be recorded separately and fairly.

No view will be declared correct merely on the basis of faith or preference.

Unverified folklore will not be made into historical evidence.

Tradition, literary mention, archaeological evidence, and modern history — these four will be kept distinct from one another.

No allegation will be made against any person, community, or institution for which reliable evidence is not available.

Rather than lifting the language of other authors verbatim, research-based analysis will be presented in independent words.

Where direct quotation is necessary, the source will be noted and the quotation kept limited.

References will be arranged systematically at the end of the chapter.

Where evidence is insufficient, it will be clearly stated that decisive evidence on the subject is not available.

And, most importantly – where information is not certain, it will not be fabricated.

1. Ram's Residence at Panchavati

During the exile, Shri Ram, Sita, and Lakshman reach Panchavati. In the Aranya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, Panchavati is mentioned among the important residences of Ram's exile.

Ram asks Lakshman to choose a place with water, fruit, and flowers, and an environment suitable for residence. Lakshman constructs a leaf-hut there.

Thus, the forest life of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman begins at Panchavati.

Many beliefs have developed, in later traditions, regarding the identification of Panchavati. The religious tradition connecting it with the present-day Nashik region is particularly well known. But

the religious identity of a present-day site cannot automatically be regarded as archaeological evidence.

This distinction is necessary to maintain throughout the treatise.

2. The Natural Environment of Panchavati

The Valmiki Ramayana contains many descriptions of the forest, river, trees, and animals, and the natural environment.

The life of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman passes here amid nature.

Far from the royal palace, this life brings forward a different aspect of Ram's personality.

In Ayodhya, he was a prince. At Panchavati, he is a forest-dweller.

But restraint and a sense of duty remain present in his conduct.

3. The Arrival of Shurpanakha

At Panchavati, the narrative of the Ramayana reaches a new turning point.

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Shurpanakha appears before Ram and Lakshman.

Seeing Ram, she expresses a wish to marry him.

Ram tells her that he is married, and that Sita is with him.

Thereafter, Shurpanakha approaches Lakshman. Lakshman, too, does not accept her proposal.

Further in the narrative, Shurpanakha becomes aggressive toward Sita, and Lakshman cuts off her nose and ears.

This event becomes an important background for the conflict that follows.

4. How Should the Shurpanakha Episode Be Understood?

Extreme caution is required here from a research standpoint.

This episode should be presented in the very form in which it occurs in the original narrative of the Ramayana.

Many additional stories and interpretations regarding this event are found in later folk traditions.

It would not be proper to treat all of these as the original narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana.

In our treatise, therefore, the description of the Valmiki Ramayana will be kept separate, and later folk/regional traditions will be kept separate.

5. The Dispute Reaching Khara and Dushana

After her disgrace, Shurpanakha goes to her relatives and supporters.

According to the Ramayana, she sends Khara and other demon warriors against Ram.

Before Ram now arises a situation of armed conflict, going beyond a personal dispute.

Ram fights.

The Valmiki Ramayana gives a detailed account of Ram's defeat of Khara, Dushana, and the warriors who came with them.

This episode is an important example of Ram's skill in warfare.

6. The Battle with Khara and Dushana

In the battle with Khara and Dushana, Ram alone confronts a large number of warriors – such is the account found in the Valmiki Ramayana.

Here, once again, an important research caution is necessary.

The numbers of soldiers described in an epic should not be presented as figures of modern military history.

It would be proper to place the numbers and the description of the battle within the context of that same literary source.

This will maintain, in the treatise, the distinction between fact and poetic description.

7. Shurpanakha's Vengeance

After the defeat of Khara and Dushana, Shurpanakha's disgrace takes an even more serious turn.

She goes to Ravana, the king of Lanka, and tells him about Ram and Sita.

It is from this point that the narrative moves in the direction of the great conflict between Ram and Ravana.

But different interpretations of this episode are found across various Ramayana traditions.

Wherever the original account of the Valmiki Ramayana exists, therefore, we shall take it as our basis.

8. An Introduction to Ravana

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana is the powerful king of Lanka.

He is presented as learned, an ascetic, and extremely powerful, but also as a character connected with arrogance and adharma.

In later religious traditions, many different aspects of Ravana's character developed.

Some traditions give particular importance to his scholarship and his devotion to Shiva.

But it is not necessary, on the basis of these qualities, to justify the acts he committed.

In historical writing, the different aspects of a person should be viewed separately.

9. Ravana and Maricha

Ravana plans to abduct Sita. For this, he seeks Maricha's help.

Maricha is already acquainted with Ram's power, and advises Ravana to stay away from this plan.

This episode presents an important moral point in the Ramayana –

Ignoring a warning, despite receiving it, before making a wrong decision.

Ravana does not heed Maricha's advice.

10. The Episode of the Golden Deer

According to the Ramayana, Maricha takes the form of a golden deer.

Seeing that wondrous deer, Sita expresses a wish to obtain it.

Ram goes after it.

At some distance, Maricha calls out in Ram's voice.

On hearing that voice, Sita urges Lakshman to go to Ram's assistance.

Lakshman is initially assured that no danger can befall Ram.

But at Sita's insistence, he leaves the hut and goes toward Ram.

Taking advantage of this very opportunity, Ravana approaches Sita.

11. The Abduction of Sita

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana comes in the guise of an ascetic and asks Sita for alms.

Thereafter, he reveals his true form and, abducting Sita, takes her away with him.

Sita resists this.

She calls out to Ram and Lakshman.

In this episode, Sita's courage and her attempt to protect her dignity are clearly visible.

12. Jatayu's Effort

At the time of Sita's abduction, Jatayu attempts to stop Ravana.

Jatayu is described as a friend of Dasharatha.

Despite being aged, he fights Ravana to protect Sita.

Ravana wounds Jatayu.

Jatayu later informs Ram of Sita's abduction and gives up his life.

This episode is an extremely poignant example, in the Ramayana, of sacrifice and loyalty.

13. Ram's Grief

When Ram returns and does not find Sita in the hut, he becomes extremely distraught.

Here, Ram's human aspect is very clearly visible.

He wanders through the forest in search of Sita.

He asks the trees, the animals and birds, and the forest region about Sita – such is the poignant description found in the Ramayana.

Here, Ram appears not merely as a divine power, but as a sorrowful husband who has lost his beloved wife.

14. The Final Dialogue with Jatayu

Ram finds Jatayu in a wounded condition.

Jatayu tells him that Ravana has taken Sita in the direction of the south.

Thereafter, Jatayu gives up his life.

Ram performs Jatayu's last rites.

This event brings forward an important human aspect of Ram's character.

Ram does not regard Jatayu merely as a bird, but honours him as a friend of his father and a companion who gave his life to protect Sita.

15. The Importance of the Abduction of Sita

The abduction of Sita is a decisive turning point in the narrative of the Ramayana.

Until now, Ram's exile had chiefly been a narrative of sacrifice and forest life connected with Ayodhya.

Now, the purpose of his journey changes.

The search for Sita, and securing her freedom, becomes the principal goal of Ram's life.

Further on, during this very search, Ram meets many important characters – Kabandha, Shabari, Hanuman, Sugriva, Jambavan, Angada.

And, ultimately, Ram's journey reaches Lanka.

16. The Geographical Journey of the Ramayana

After the abduction of Sita, Ram's journey takes an extremely broad form within Indian cultural geography.

The narrative, beginning in Ayodhya, now becomes connected with the traditions of Central and South India, reaching Lanka.

But here, once again, the same research method is necessary — the place described in the Ramayana, local religious tradition, modern geographical identification, and archaeological evidence — these four will not be made substitutes for one another.

17. Our Policy Regarding the Views of Historians

If different views of historians are found regarding a place, event, or character, the book will, for example, be written as follows —

View 1: A certain scholar/tradition understands it in this way. View 2: Other scholars hold a contrary view. Available evidence: on the basis of present evidence, it is/is not possible to establish either one decisively.

This will enable the reader to understand both sides for themselves.

Our purpose is not to defeat any view, but to place the evidence before the reader.

18. A Particular Caution Regarding Copyright

Long passages, language, or the specific presentation of any modern author's book will not be copied and placed in this treatise.

There is no modern copyright, in the modern sense, held by any single person over the narrative and ideas of ancient texts such

as the Valmiki Ramayana; but modern translations, editions, commentaries, and research books may carry copyright.

We shall, therefore, present material in our own independent, research-based words, while citing the source.

Wherever it is necessary to use the specific idea of a modern book or article, the author and source will be properly cited.

19. A Legal Caution

Throughout this treatise, nothing will be written about any living person, institution, community, or scholar that could damage their reputation without sufficient evidence.

Where mention of a historical dispute is necessary, the language will be — 'such a view is found in such-and-such a source' or 'such-and-such a historian has presented this view.'

We shall not, on our own account, write any disputed allegation as fact.

Likewise, where evidence is insufficient, it will be clearly stated — 'independent confirmation of this claim could not be found in the available sources.'

This is a strong research method, not a weakness.

20. The Journey So Far in Chapter 7

So far, we have viewed Shri Ram's life in sequence –

birth → education → the journey with Vishwamitra → Mithila → the marriage to Sita → Ayodhya → preparations for the coronation → exile → Chitrakuta → the meeting with Bharat → Dandakaranya → Panchavati → Shurpanakha → Khara-Dushana → the abduction of Sita.

The narrative will now enter its next great stage.

Conclusion

The episode at Panchavati is a decisive turning point in Shri Ram's life.

Up to this point, Ram had accepted the exile while upholding his father's word. But after the abduction of Sita, his life becomes connected with a new purpose.

Now, before him lies not merely the completion of his own exile, but the question of the search for Sita and the protection of her honour.

The sacrifice of Jatayu, Ram's grief, and his journey toward the south become the foundation for the whole of the Ram narrative that follows.

From here, Ram's journey will take him to Kishkindha, Hanuman, Sugriva, and the vanara community.

And it is this very next stage that transforms the Ram narrative, beyond Ayodhya, into a broad Indian cultural narrative.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, Panchavati.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the episodes of Shurpanakha and Khara-Dushana.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the episode of Maricha and the golden deer.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the abduction of Sita.

5. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the episode of Jatayu.

6. Later Ramayana and Indian regional traditions – for comparative study.

CHAPTER 8

From Shri Ram's Forest Journey to Kishkindha: Hanuman, Sugriva, and a New Direction

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Part 1: The Search for Sita, and the Meetings with Kabandha and Shabari

In the previous chapter, we studied the events up to Panchavati, Shurpanakha, Khara-Dushana, Maricha, and the abduction of Sita. After Sita's abduction, the direction of Shri Ram's life changes. His principal purpose now is to find Sita.

In this chapter, we shall view Ram's further journey in sequence. Wherever religious tradition and historical evidence differ, the two will be kept clearly distinct.

1. Ram and Lakshman in Search of Sita

After Sita's disappearance, Ram and Lakshman search for her in the forest.

Ram is extremely distraught. He attempts to obtain signs of Sita from the trees, the creepers, the animals and birds, and various places of the forest.

This episode brings forward an extremely human aspect of Ram's character.

He is a powerful warrior, but in separation from his wife, he is also a sorrowful husband.

It is precisely this duality that makes the character of the Ramayana so human and so influential.

2. Information Obtained from Jatayu

Ram and Lakshman find Jatayu, wounded.

Jatayu tells them that Ravana has taken Sita away with him, in the direction of the south.

After Jatayu's death, Ram performs his last rites.

This episode shows both duty and compassion within Ram.

Jatayu had sacrificed his life to protect Sita. Ram honours this sacrifice of his.

3. The Journey Toward the South

After the information received from Jatayu, Ram and Lakshman proceed toward the south.

On this journey, they face many difficult circumstances.

This very journey, going forward, brings them to the characters who will play a decisive role in the search for Sita.

Among these, Kabandha, Shabari, Hanuman, and Sugriva are particularly important.

4. The Episode of Kabandha

In the Aranya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana comes the episode of a strange character named Kabandha.

Kabandha fights with Ram and Lakshman.

Ram and Lakshman cut off both his arms.

Thereafter, Kabandha relates the story of his former life and of a curse.

This episode carries the narrative of the Ramayana toward a new stage.

Kabandha shows Ram the way ahead, toward the hermitage of the sage Matanga and toward Shabari.

5. Kabandha's Story and a Research Caution

A particular story of a curse and transformation occurs, in the Ramayana, in connection with Kabandha.

It is proper to present this as religious-epic narrative.

It would not be proper to claim, on the basis of modern history or archaeology, an actual historical existence for Kabandha.

In this book, therefore, in relation to such characters, we shall clearly use phrases such as 'according to the Valmiki Ramayana'.

This will keep clear, for the reader, the distinction between literary tradition and history.

6. The Journey Toward Shabari

Following Kabandha's direction, Ram and Lakshman proceed onward.

Their journey brings them to Shabari's hermitage.

The episode of Shabari is among the most popular episodes of the Ramayana.

She served her guru, the sage Matanga, and awaited Ram's arrival – such is the account in the Valmiki Ramayana.

7. Shabari's Welcome

When Ram reaches Shabari's hermitage, Shabari welcomes him.

She expresses her reverence for Ram.

The Valmiki Ramayana mentions Shabari's hermitage and the welcome she extended.

In later devotional traditions, this episode was extended extremely widely.

In particular, in folk tales, the story of Shabari offering Ram half-eaten berries is extremely famous.

But here, an important distinction will be maintained in our treatise –

the episode described in the Valmiki Ramayana and the story of the berries current in later folk-devotional tradition will not be treated as an account from the same original source.

8. The Importance of Shabari's Character

Shabari's character became, in Indian devotional tradition, a symbol of unfeigned reverence.

Her story conveys the message that, in devotion to God, reverence and surrender matter more than external splendour.

Later saint literature and folk traditions made Shabari's character still more popular.

The study of Shabari can, therefore, be undertaken not merely as that of a character of the Ramayana, but also in the context of the development of Indian devotional culture.

9. The Tradition of the Sage Matanga

Shabari's story is connected with the tradition of the sage Matanga.

The Valmiki Ramayana contains an episode relating to the sage Matanga's hermitage and his disciples.

In later traditions, various sites connected with the Matanga hermitage have been identified.

But before treating any modern site definitely as the same site as that hermitage of the Valmiki Ramayana, independent evidence is necessary.

We shall, therefore, respect tradition, while not placing it on a par with historical evidence.

10. Direction Received from Shabari

Shabari shows Ram the way further onward, toward Lake Pampa and Mount Rishyamuka.

It is from this point that the Ram narrative enters an important new stage.

Until now, Ram had been wandering alone in search of Sita.

Going forward, he was to meet allies who would transform the search for Sita into an organized campaign.

11. Toward Lake Pampa

Ram and Lakshman proceed onward from Shabari's hermitage.

They go toward the Pampa region.

The natural beauty of Pampa and its atmosphere are described in the Ramayana in an extremely poignant manner.

Viewing nature in separation from Sita, Ram becomes immersed in her memory.

Here, the poetic aspect of the Ramayana is particularly visible.

12. Ram's Human Aspect

Amid the natural description of Pampa, Ram's separation from Sita again comes to the fore.

Here, Ram views the beauty of nature, but that same beauty, without Sita, brings him sorrow.

This brings forward an important aspect of Valmiki's Ram –

he is a great warrior, and also a human being connected with emotion.

It is precisely this humanity that makes Ram's character so influential in Indian literature.

13. Toward Mount Rishyamuka

The mention of Mount Rishyamuka, near the Pampa region, occurs in the Ramayana.

It is here that Sugriva dwells, with his companions.

Sugriva is fearful of his brother Vali, and regards Mount Rishyamuka as a relatively safe place.

It is from here that vanara-king Sugriva and Hanuman enter Ram's narrative.

14. A Decisive Change in the Narrative

In the search for Sita, Ram has, until now, met characters such as Jatayu → Kabandha → Shabari.

His journey will now take him to Sugriva and Hanuman.

It is from this point that Ram's personal search transforms into an organized campaign.

Sugriva, too, needs a solution to his own problem. Ram needs assistance for the search for Sita.

The needs of the two become connected with one another.

15. History and Tradition: Our Clear Policy

From this chapter onward as well, we shall keep three levels distinct –

first – textual evidence: what is written in the Valmiki Ramayana.

second – later religious and folk tradition: what developed in later Ramayana texts, saint literature, and local beliefs.

third – historical/archaeological evidence: what independent historical or archaeological evidence is available in support of any claim.

These three will not be combined and declared a single fact.

Conclusion

After the abduction of Sita, Shri Ram's journey no longer remains merely a journey of sorrow and search.

The information received from Jatayu, the guidance of Kabandha, and the meeting with Shabari carry him in the direction of Pampa and Rishyamuka.

The narrative has now reached the important turning point at which Shri Ram will meet Hanuman and Sugriva.

It is from this point that a new chapter of friendship, cooperation, pledge, and collective effort begins in the Ramayana.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the episode of Jatayu.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the episode of Kabandha.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Aranya Kanda, the episode of Shabari and the Matanga hermitage.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the Pampa and Rishyamuka region.

5. Later Ramayana, devotional, and folk traditions – for comparative study.

Part 2: The First Meeting with Hanuman, Friendship with Sugriva, and the Pledge of Assistance

In the previous Part, Shri Ram and Lakshman moved on from Shabari's hermitage and reached the region of Lake Pampa and Mount Rishyamuka. It is from here that an extremely important change occurs in the Ram narrative – Shri Ram meets Hanuman, and, going forward, his friendship with Sugriva is established.

1. Sugriva on Mount Rishyamuka

According to the Kishkindha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, Sugriva was living, with some of his trusted companions, in the region of Mount Rishyamuka.

Sugriva was fearful of his elder brother Vali. A serious dispute had arisen between the two brothers, and Sugriva feared that Vali might kill him.

Mount Rishyamuka was, for him, a relatively safe place.

An important point here is that the detailed account of the Vali-Sugriva dispute comes later. We shall, therefore, first understand the situation between them, and then study its causes in sequence.

2. Fear at the Sight of Two Unknown Men

Sugriva saw Ram and Lakshman approaching from a distance.

Both appeared with royal splendour, equipped with bow and arrow, and capable in battle.

Sugriva suspected that Vali might have sent them against him.

He sent his companion Hanuman to ascertain the situation.

It is from this point that the episode of the first meeting of Ram and Hanuman begins.

3. An Introduction to Hanuman

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Hanuman is presented as an extremely intelligent, valiant, and eloquent character.

He is Sugriva's principal ally.

Hanuman is not renowned for strength alone. Among his most important characteristics are intelligence, discernment, skill in speech, understanding of circumstance, loyalty, and the capacity to complete a task.

In later Indian devotional tradition, Hanuman's form became still broader, becoming a symbol of devotion, strength, and service.

4. Hanuman's Guise

According to the Ramayana, Hanuman comes to Ram and Lakshman to learn their identity.

He does not immediately reveal his own true form.

He approaches them in the guise of an ascetic – such is the description found in the Kishkindha Kanda.

Hanuman converses with both brothers in an extremely humble and thoughtful manner.

Ram is impressed by his speech.

5. Ram's Praise of Hanuman

On hearing Hanuman's conversation, Ram speaks particularly to Lakshman about him.

Ram praises Hanuman's language, pronunciation, grammar, and skill in conversation.

This episode is extremely important.

It shows that, in ancient Indian literature, good speech, linguistic knowledge, and skill in conversation were regarded as important qualities of leadership.

Alongside Hanuman's strength, his intelligence is equally important.

6. The Introduction of Ram and Hanuman

Hanuman asks Ram and Lakshman the reason for their coming to the forest.

Ram relates his circumstances.

He tells him of the exile from Ayodhya, the abduction of Sita, and the search for her.

Hanuman understands that this is the very Ram whose help could also be useful for Sugriva.

He decides to take both brothers to Sugriva.

7. The First Meeting of Ram and Sugriva

Hanuman takes Ram and Lakshman to Sugriva.

Sugriva had been fearful earlier, but Hanuman reassures him.

Ram and Sugriva become acquainted with one another.

Each faces his own problem – Ram's problem is the search for Sita; Sugriva's problem is fear of Vali and the recovery of his own right.

It is from this point that the possibility of cooperation between the two arises.

8. The Proposal of Friendship

Ram and Sugriva agree to help one another.

Ram wishes to search for Sita with Sugriva's assistance.

Sugriva wishes to recover his lost right with Ram's assistance.

This relationship is not based on personal benefit alone.

Trust and pledge are established between the two.

Later tradition gave this the particular honour of being called the friendship of Ram and Sugriva.

9. Friendship before the Fire

According to Ramayana tradition, Ram and Sugriva take a pledge of friendship, with Agni (fire) as witness.

This episode reveals the seriousness of friendship and pledge within ancient Indian culture.

Taking Agni as witness was not merely a religious rite. It was also a symbol of making a pledge public and sacred.

10. Sugriva's Mention of Sita's Ornaments

Sugriva tells Ram that he had seen a woman passing overhead through the sky.

That woman had dropped some ornaments below.

Ram, seeing those ornaments, attempts to identify them as Sita's.

This episode is extremely poignant in the Ramayana.

With particular reference to Lakshman, it is said that he was able to recognize the anklets, for he bowed daily at Sita's feet.

This episode became a celebrated narrative revealing Lakshman's restraint and propriety.

11. The Cultural Importance of Sita's Ornaments

The episode of Sita's ornaments is not merely a means of identification.

For Ram, it becomes proof that Sita had been taken in the direction of the south, and that the path of her search could now advance.

Sugriva's information becomes a foundation of hope for Ram.

Ram's search can now proceed in a definite direction.

12. Sugriva's Own Story

Ram asks Sugriva the reason for his sorrow.

Sugriva relates the story of the dispute that arose with his brother Vali.

He tells how, because of circumstances, enmity arose between the two brothers.

Sugriva states that Vali seized his kingdom and drove him out of Kishkindha.

An important political and moral question of the Ramayana arises here –

should Ram intervene in Sugriva's personal conflict?

The answer to this question is found, later, in the episode of the slaying of Vali.

13. The Dispute of Vali and Sugriva

A detailed account of the dispute between Vali and Sugriva is found in the Kishkindha Kanda.

The background of the dispute is connected with an episode involving a conflict between Vali and a demon, and an entry into a cave.

Seeing the circumstances, Sugriva concludes that Vali has died.

He closes the mouth of the cave and returns to Kishkindha.

Later, Vali returns alive, and accuses Sugriva of betrayal.

It is from this point that serious enmity arises between the two brothers.

14. The Distinction between History and Narrative

The story of Vali and Sugriva is part of the original narrative of the Ramayana.

But determining the identity of any actual historical dynasty or modern community on the basis of it is a separate question.

Different views are found among religious, literary, and modern scholars regarding the interpretation of the word 'vanara'.

In this treatise, therefore, we shall not declare any modern caste or community directly equivalent to the vanaras of the Ramayana, without sufficient evidence.

15. Sugriva's Trust

Sugriva wishes to be reassured regarding Ram's power.

He places before Ram certain proofs by which Ram's power could be tested.

Ram demonstrates his power.

This episode shows the process of establishing trust within friendship.

The relationship of Ram and Sugriva was not merely emotional. It was necessary for each to have confidence in the other's capacity.

16. The Broad Meaning of the Friendship

The friendship of Ram and Sugriva is an important example of cooperation in the Ramayana.

From Sugriva, Ram receives the cooperation of the vanara community, search parties in various directions, a great envoy such as Hanuman, and assistance in reaching Lanka.

From Ram, Sugriva receives help against Vali, the opportunity to regain his kingdom, and security.

Thus, the friendship of the two, going forward, changes the direction of the entire Ram narrative.

17. Hanuman's Role

In this entire episode, Hanuman comes to the fore as the most important link.

Had Hanuman not established contact between Ram and Sugriva, the friendship of the two would not have been possible so quickly.

For this reason, Hanuman's contribution should be viewed not merely as that of a warrior, but also as envoy, diplomat, friend, and servant.

In later devotional tradition, precisely these qualities make him one of the supreme symbols of devotion to Ram.

18. A Research Caution

The principal basis of the events described in this Part is the Kishkindha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana.

Later, these events were extended in many languages and traditions of the Ram narrative.

Therefore, wherever an additional event is found in a later narrative, it will not be written as though it were the original account of the Valmiki Ramayana.

Similarly, where the views of modern historians differ, they will be presented separately.

19. The Next Decisive Event

The friendship of Ram and Sugriva has now been established. Now the time comes for both to fulfil their pledges.

Ram is to help Sugriva. Sugriva is to help Ram recover his kingdom.

Its next stage is the conflict between Vali and Sugriva.

This episode is among the most discussed moral questions of the Ramayana.

Why did Ram slay Vali? Was this in accordance with kshatriya dharma? What explanation did Ram himself give for it? And how did later texts and historians understand it?

These questions will be presented fairly, with the arguments of both sides, in the Part that follows.

Conclusion

The first meeting of Ram and Hanuman is a great turning point in the narrative of the Ramayana.

Hanuman's intelligence connected Ram and Sugriva.

Ram and Sugriva made friendship, with Agni as witness.

Both resolved to help one another.

Ram's search for Sita had now gained organized cooperation.

And hope was awakened, in Sugriva's life as well, of regaining his right.

Thus, the trio of Ram-Hanuman-Sugriva, going forward, becomes the foundation of the most important sequence of events in the Ramayana.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the first meeting of Ram and Hanuman.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the friendship of Ram and Sugriva.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the episode of Sita's ornaments.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the background of the Vali-Sugriva dispute.

5. Various later Ramayana and devotional traditions, for comparative study.

Part 3: The Vali-Sugriva Conflict, Ram's Decision, and the Kingdom of Kishkindha

In the previous Part, the friendship of Ram and Sugriva was established. The narrative now enters that difficult and controversial episode in which Shri Ram helps Sugriva, and Vali is slain.

We shall write this episode with particular care, for the morality of Vali's slaying has long been discussed within traditions of the Ramayana. Rather than treating any single interpretation as final truth, presenting the available arguments separately is the research-based method.

1. The Old Dispute of Vali and Sugriva

The background of the conflict between Vali and Sugriva is given in detail in the Kishkindha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana.

The two were brothers, connected with the royal family of Kishkindha.

On one occasion, a demon named Mayavi challenges Vali to battle. Vali pursues him and enters a cave. Sugriva, too, follows him, but after some time, seeing blood and hearing a terrible sound from within the cave, he concludes that Vali has been killed.

Sugriva closes the mouth of the cave and returns.

Thereafter, circumstances develop such that Sugriva takes up the governance of Kishkindha.

But Vali returns alive.

It is from this point that a serious dispute arises between the two brothers.

2. Vali's Anger

Vali regards Sugriva as a betrayer.

He expels Sugriva from the kingdom and takes his wife Ruma under his own authority – such is the account in the Valmiki Ramayana.

Sugriva saves his life and goes to Mount Rishyamuka.

Vali could not go there, for a story of a curse connected with Rishyamuka occurs in the Ramayana.

Thus, Sugriva spends a long time living in fear.

3. Sugriva's Request for Help

After his friendship with Ram, Sugriva relates his entire story to him.

He asks Ram for help.

Ram gives his word to help him.

Here, the pledges of both become connected – Ram will have Sugriva's kingdom restored to him; Sugriva will help Ram in the search for Sita.

This friendship, going forward, becomes the foundation of the greatest campaign of the Ramayana.

4. Ram's Assurance to Sugriva

Sugriva was fearful of Vali's power.

Ram assures him that he is capable of defeating Vali.

To dispel Sugriva's doubt regarding Ram's power, Ram demonstrates his extraordinary skill in archery and physical strength.

This strengthens Sugriva's confidence.

5. The First Challenge to Vali

Sugriva challenges Vali to battle.

Vali comes out.

A terrible battle takes place between the two brothers.

Ram is present there, but because the two brothers' forms are very similar, he is unable, on this first occasion, to identify clearly which one is Sugriva.

For this reason, Ram does not shoot an arrow on that occasion.

Sugriva returns, wounded.

6. The Second Challenge

After this, Sugriva again prepares to challenge Vali.

This time, in order to keep his identity clear, he is given a particular mark.

Vali again comes for battle.

Conflict again arises between the two brothers.

Ram waits for the proper opportunity.

And, ultimately, Ram shoots an arrow at Vali.

7. Vali Wounded

Vali's arrow wounds him gravely, and he falls to the ground.

It is from this point that the most important moral dialogue of the Ramayana begins.

Vali questions Ram –

Why did you kill me without fighting me face to face?

His question is not merely personal resentment.

He questions the morality of Ram's act.

8. Vali's Arguments

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Vali places several questions before Ram.

His principal argument is that Ram had no personal quarrel with him.

He also questions why Ram intervened in a conflict occurring between two brothers.

And he also objects that Ram struck him with an arrow while hidden.

This question remained much discussed in later interpretations of the Ramayana as well.

9. Ram's Answer

Ram answers Vali's question.

An important basis of his argument is that Vali violated dharma by taking his brother's wife under his own authority.

Ram presents himself as the representative of the Ikshvaku dynasty and as a kshatriya protecting dharma.

His argument is that punishing one who commits adharma is part of rajadharma.

From this standpoint, Ram's intervention is presented not merely as personal assistance to Sugriva, but as the establishment of dharma.

10. The Question of Shooting Hidden

Vali's most important question was precisely this – why did Ram not fight face to face?

This question remains a subject of discussion in the study of the Ramayana even today.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ram presents arguments relating to his kshatriya dharma and to Vali's conduct.

But the modern reader may also view this episode from a different moral standpoint.

It would not, therefore, be proper here to present any single side as the final judgment.

11. Different Perspectives

In the traditional view, Ram punished Vali, who had committed adharma.

Vali's taking of Sugriva's wife under his own authority is regarded as the principal basis of his offence.

From a critical standpoint, some modern interpreters raise the question of how Ram's shooting from concealment accords with the ordinary moral rules of warfare.

They view Vali's question as a serious moral objection.

The research-based conclusion is that it is more proper to place both sides before the reader.

We shall conceal neither Vali's objection, nor Ram's answer.

The reader has the full right to know both arguments.

12. The Outcome of Ram's Decision

Vali is near death. Ram converses with him.

Vali ultimately understands his situation, and expresses concern for his son Angada and his wife Tara.

Ram tells Sugriva to follow the proper path.

This episode brings forward the sense of proper conduct even toward an enemy in his final moments.

13. Tara's Lament

After Vali's death, the lament of his wife Tara is among the most poignant episodes of the Ramayana.

Tara is presented as a wise and far-sighted character.

She had earlier advised Vali not to take Sugriva's challenge lightly.

But Vali did not heed her words.

After Vali's death, Tara mourns for her husband.

This episode brings forward the human consequence of war in the Ramayana.

14. Angada's Future

Vali's son Angada, going forward, plays an important role in the Ram narrative.

In the Ramayana, Angada is given honour in Sugriva's kingdom.

Later, in the Lanka campaign as well, Angada plays an important role as Ram's envoy.

Thus, even after Vali's death, his lineage does not end in the Ram narrative.

15. Sugriva's Coronation

After Vali's death, Sugriva is made king of Kishkindha.

In this way, Ram fulfilled his pledge.

Now it was Sugriva's turn to help Ram.

But the rainy season arrives, and the campaign to search for Sita is postponed for some time.

It is from this point that a new tension arises in the relationship between Ram and Sugriva.

16. The Rainy Season and Ram's Wait

Ram and Lakshman remain at one place and await the passing of the rainy season.

Ram is distraught in separation from Sita.

He hopes that, as soon as the rains end, Sugriva will begin the campaign to search for Sita.

But time passes. Sugriva becomes absorbed in royal power and comforts.

Lakshman becomes angry at this.

17. Lakshman's Journey to Kishkindha

When Sugriva does not come to Ram's assistance at the appointed time, Ram sends Lakshman to him.

Lakshman reaches Kishkindha in anger.

Sugriva is reminded of the pledge made to Ram.

Sugriva acknowledges his error and prepares a vast campaign for the search for Sita.

18. Hanuman's Role Becomes Still More Important

In the campaign organized by Sugriva, Hanuman's place becomes extremely important.

Search parties are sent in various directions.

The Kishkindha Kanda describes the sending of parties toward the north, south, east, and west.

The party going south is particularly important, for it is from that direction that indication of Sita's presence in Lanka is later obtained.

19. Hanuman in Ram's View

Ram understands Hanuman's capability.

Hanuman is not merely strong.

He is intelligent, discerning, capable of deciding according to circumstance, and completely loyal to Ram.

Later, in the search for Sita, Hanuman's role becomes so important that the entire course of the Ram narrative appears to depend on his action.

20. A Necessary Point from a Research Standpoint

In an episode such as the slaying of Vali, our purpose is not to hurt any religious sentiment.

But the purpose of a research treatise is also not merely to praise.

Where a question has been raised, it is also not proper to conceal that question.

We shall give both Ram's argument and Vali's objection.

Similarly, when other disputed episodes of the Ramayana come up ahead, the same method will be adopted regarding them as well – original source → various interpretations → available evidence → a careful conclusion.

Conclusion

The story of Vali and Sugriva brings forward the complex relationships of power, family, justice, and rajadharma in the Ramayana.

Ram helped Sugriva, and he received back the kingdom of Kishkindha.

But the manner of Vali's slaying leaves a question on which tradition and modern thought offer differing perspectives.

We have therefore placed before the reader, in this episode, both Ram's side and Vali's objection, rather than suppressing either.

Kishkindha has now become the principal allied centre of Ram's search for Sita.

In the Part that follows, we shall study the departure of the vanara parties for the search for Sita, the campaign toward the south, and the process of reaching information about Sampati and Lanka.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the Vali-Sugriva conflict.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, Vali's slaying by Ram and their dialogue.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, the episodes of Tara and Angada.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Kishkindha Kanda, Sugriva's coronation and the preparation for the search for Sita.

5. Later Ramayana traditions and modern interpretations, for comparative study.

Part 4: The Campaign to Search for Sita, the Journey to the South, and the Meeting with Sampati

In the previous Part, we saw the slaying of Vali, Sugriva's coronation, and the pledge between Ram and Sugriva. The narrative now enters the stage where Sugriva, in accordance with his word, sends vanara parties in various directions to search for Sita.

In this Part, the principal basis will be the narrative of the Kishkindha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana. Later folk and religious traditions will be kept distinct from the original narrative of Valmiki.

1. Remembering Sugriva's Word

After Vali's slaying, Sugriva becomes king of Kishkindha.

After the rainy season passes, Ram expects assistance from his friend Sugriva in searching for Sita.

When the expected action is not forthcoming from Sugriva for some time, Lakshman goes to Kishkindha and reminds him of the pledge made to Ram.

Sugriva realizes his error and immediately prepares a broad campaign for the search for Sita.

2. The Organization of the Vanara Parties

Sugriva organizes the various parties under his command.

The Ramayana describes the sending of search parties in different directions.

These parties are instructed to search for Sita in mountains, rivers, forest regions, and various geographical areas.

This episode brings forward, for the first time in the Ram narrative, the form of an organized search campaign.

The search for Sita is now no longer merely the personal journey of Ram and Lakshman.

3. The Search in Four Directions

On Sugriva's instruction, vanara parties are sent to the east, west, north, and south.

Each party is given the task of searching in designated regions.

This description is also important for the study of the ancient geography of the Ramayana.

But caution is necessary here.

It is not always proper to equate directly the ancient places and regions named in the Ramayana with modern countries, states, or districts.

Wherever disagreement exists among modern scholars, we shall present both views separately.

4. The Southern Party

Because of the indications available regarding Sita, the campaign toward the south acquires particular importance.

This party includes Angada, Hanuman, Jambavan, and other principal vanaras.

Angada is among the principal leaders of this party.

Jambavan is renowned for his experience and discernment.

And Hanuman is about to become the most important link of this campaign.

5. Jambavan's Role

Jambavan is presented, in the Ramayana, as an extremely experienced and wise character.

He inspires the members of the party to remain patient in difficult circumstances and to remember their purpose.

Later, it is this same Jambavan who reminds Hanuman of his own power.

This episode will become the decisive turning point of Hanuman's life.

6. The Difficult Journey

The southern search party passes through many difficult regions.

They face difficulties such as forests, mountains, uninhabited regions, and a lack of water sources.

Time passes, and no definite trace of Sita is found.

The party faces a dual problem – finding Sita, and returning within the appointed time.

7. The Crisis of the Time Limit

Sugriva had instructed the search parties to return within a fixed period.

The southern party becomes anxious because time is passing.

If they return without any information, they will face failure.

In this situation, despair begins to grow among the party.

It is this very crisis that, going forward, brings them to an important character.

8. Entering a Cave

The vanara party reaches the region of an extremely difficult and mysterious cave.

They enter within, and there obtain necessary items such as water and food.

After some time, they meet an ascetic woman connected with that place.

This episode is among the poetic and wondrous descriptions of the Ramayana.

From a research standpoint, it would be proper to place it in that same form, as part of the narrative of the Ramayana.

9. Emerging from the Cave

After coming out of the cave, the vanara party again faces a difficult circumstance.

They reach near the ocean.

Before them now lies a vast expanse of water.

The party understands that, if Sita is in Lanka, reaching there will be extremely difficult.

But they did not yet know for certain where Sita was.

10. An Atmosphere of Despair

Despite the long search, despair grows in the party at not finding any trace of Sita.

Many vanaras, including Angada, become anxious over the failure of their campaign.

They feel uncertain what answer they will give on returning to Kishkindha.

The narrative now reaches an important turning point.

On the shore of the ocean, they see an aged and extraordinary bird.

It was – Sampati.

11. An Introduction to Sampati

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Sampati is described as Jatayu's elder brother.

Jatayu had already given his life in battle with Ravana, while protecting Sita.

Now, in Ram's search for Sita, the role of Jatayu's brother Sampati comes to the fore.

Thus, Jatayu's story continues forward through a new thread.

12. Sampati and Jatayu

When the vanara party mentions Jatayu's name, Sampati's emotions are awakened.

He learns that Jatayu gave his life while protecting Sita.

This news is extremely poignant for him.

Sampati understands Jatayu's sacrifice, and decides to help in Ram's campaign.

13. Sampati's Information

Sampati tells the vanaras that he had seen Ravana taking Sita in the direction of the south – such is the account in the Valmiki Ramayana.

He gives important information regarding the direction of Lanka.

Now, for the first time, the vanara party has a solid direction regarding Sita's whereabouts.

Sita is in Lanka.

This information changes the direction of the entire campaign.

14. The Mention of Lanka

From Sampati's statement, the vanaras learn that Lanka lies across the ocean, and that Sita is kept there.

Now the question is – who will cross the ocean?

This problem was not a simple one.

Before the vanara party lay a vast ocean.

It is from this point that the narrative moves toward Hanuman's extraordinary role.

15. The Question of Hanuman's Power

The members of the party speak of crossing the ocean according to their own respective capacities.

But for no one was this task simple.

Hanuman himself was not, at that time, fully aware of his own power.

It is then that Jambavan reminds him of his capability.

This episode becomes the foundation for Hanuman's great deed that follows.

16. Jambavan's Inspiration to Hanuman

Jambavan reminds Hanuman of the power of his birth and childhood – such is the account in Ramayana tradition.

He tells him that he possesses extraordinary capability.

Hanuman becomes aware of his true capacity.

His self-confidence awakens.

Now, that same Hanuman, who had gone a short time earlier as an envoy between Ram and Sugriva, is about to become the leader of Ram's most important campaign.

17. Hanuman's Resolve

Hanuman resolves to cross the ocean and go to Lanka.

His purpose is clear – to find Sita, to deliver Ram's message, and to return with news.

Here, Hanuman's role is not merely that of a strong warrior.

He comes to the fore as envoy, seeker, strategist, and messenger.

18. From Jatayu to Hanuman

A beautiful thread is visible in the narrative of the Ramayana.

Jatayu gave his life to protect Sita.

His brother Sampati tells them where Sita is.

And, on the basis of that very information, Hanuman resolves to go to Lanka.

Thus, Jatayu's sacrifice makes an indirect, but continuing, contribution to Ram's search for Sita.

19. Religious Tradition and Historical Evidence

The episode of Sampati, Hanuman, and going to Lanka across the ocean is an important part of the religious-literary narrative of the Ramayana.

Alongside it, many local traditions in various regions of India are also connected.

But we shall call a local belief connecting a particular hill, cave, seashore, or site with the episode of Sampati or Hanuman historical evidence only when independent and reliable evidence is available in its support.

Respect for tradition, and the criterion of evidence – both will proceed together.

20. Copyright and Source-Related Caution

The basis of the events in this Part is the ancient Valmiki Ramayana.

We are not presenting long passages from any modern translation or modern author's work verbatim.

The narrative has been explained in our own words, with the source noted.

This method will continue going forward as well.

If it becomes necessary to use the specific view of a modern historian or researcher, their idea will be presented independently and with proper reference.

21. Disagreement among Historians

Different views are found among scholars on subjects such as the geography of the Ramayana, the identification of Lanka, the nature of the vanara community, and the historicity of the Ramayana period.

We shall not declare any single view correct merely because it accords with our expectation.

Wherever evidence is strong, the evidence will be stated.

Wherever disagreement exists, View 1 and View 2 will be given separately.

And wherever decisive evidence is not available, this will be written – it is not yet possible to arrive at a final historical conclusion on this subject.

This will be the cornerstone of the reliability of our treatise.

Conclusion

The campaign to search for Sita, organized by Sugriva, had now reached a decisive stage.

The party that went in the southern direction faced many difficulties.

Ultimately, they met Sampati.

Sampati gave the important information that Sita was in Lanka.

Now, the entire search enters a new stage.

The ocean lies ahead, and Lanka beyond it.

Before the vanara party lies the question — who will cross the ocean?

Jambavan reminds Hanuman of his power.

And Hanuman prepares for that great task which made him a symbol, in Indian culture, of incomparable devotion, courage, intelligence, and service.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana — Kishkindha Kanda, the organization of the vanara parties and the search in the four directions.

2. Valmiki Ramayana — Kishkindha Kanda, the episode of the southern search party.

3. Valmiki Ramayana — Kishkindha Kanda, the episode of Sampati and Jatayu.

4. Valmiki Ramayana — Kishkindha Kanda, the reminder of Hanuman's power and the resolve to cross the ocean.

5. Later Ramayana and Indian folk-religious traditions, for comparative study.

Part 5: Hanuman's Crossing of the Ocean, Entry into Lanka, and the Search for Sita

In the previous Part, Sampati indicated the direction of Lanka to the south, and Jambavan reminded Hanuman of his power. The Ram narrative now enters an extremely important episode, in which Hanuman crosses the ocean and reaches Lanka.

The principal basis of this Part is the Sundara Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana. Additional episodes found in later folk and devotional traditions will be kept distinct from the original narrative of Valmiki.

1. Hanuman's Great Resolve

After Jambavan reminds him of his power, Hanuman's self-confidence awakens.

Before him lies a single purpose – to cross the ocean, reach Lanka, find Sita, and give Ram news of her.

This task was not merely one of physical strength.

He had to understand the circumstances of the way, enter Lanka, recognize Sita, and return safely.

That is, it was a test of courage, intelligence, and strategy – all three.

2. Hanuman at the Shore of the Ocean

Hanuman reaches the shore of the ocean.

The Valmiki Ramayana gives an extremely powerful description of the ocean's vastness and Hanuman's resolve.

He enlarges his body and prepares to cross the ocean.

His resolve was not merely a display of personal valour.

He had already dedicated himself to Ram's task.

3. The Crossing of the Ocean

Hanuman sets out over the ocean, toward Lanka.

In the Sundara Kanda, several episodes occur during this journey.

An important message of these episodes is that, in a journey toward a great purpose, strength alone is not sufficient.

Discernment, restraint, and the capacity for decision are also necessary at the proper time.

Hanuman makes his decisions according to each circumstance that arises before him.

4. Mount Mainaka

In the midst of the ocean, the episode of Mount Mainaka arises before Hanuman.

In the story connected with the ocean and Mainaka, the offer of an opportunity for Hanuman to rest occurs.

But Hanuman gives priority to his purpose.

He does not stop.

This episode became a symbol of his concentration on duty.

However, he does not refuse the honour of Mainaka.

In this way, he maintains a balance of both humility and duty.

5. Surasa's Test

Further on, Surasa comes before Hanuman.

According to the Ramayana, Surasa comes before Hanuman in order to test him.

She challenges him to enter her mouth.

Hanuman first enlarges his own size.

Surasa, too, keeps enlarging her mouth.

Then Hanuman suddenly reduces his size to be extremely small, and, fulfilling Surasa's condition, passes onward.

6. Intelligence above Strength

The episode of Surasa carries particular importance.

Had he wished, Hanuman could have attempted to use force alone.

But he understood the circumstance and found a solution through intelligence.

This episode brings forward an important quality of Hanuman's character –

strength where strength is necessary, and intelligence where intelligence is necessary.

7. The Episode of Simhika

After this, Simhika comes before Hanuman.

In the Ramayana, she is described as a creature possessing such power that she could seize the shadow of a creature moving through the sky.

Simhika attempts to stop Hanuman.

Hanuman understands the circumstance and confronts her.

Ultimately, freeing himself from her, he moves onward.

8. The First Sight of Lanka

After crossing the ocean, Lanka comes into Hanuman's view.

He inspects Lanka's fortifications, buildings, and security arrangements.

But he does not immediately enter the city in his vast form.

He reduces his size.

Here, once again, his strategic intelligence is visible.

9. Entry into Lanka

Hanuman enters Lanka at night.

His purpose was not to wage war.

He had to find Sita and return.

He therefore inspects the city secretly.

He observes various buildings and places, and reaches Ravana's palace.

10. The Episode of Lankini

At the entrance gate of Lanka occurs the episode of the guardian named Lankini.

She stops Hanuman.

Hanuman struggles with her.

Thereafter, Lankini understands that Hanuman's entry into Lanka is a sign of some great change.

This episode is counted among the important symbolic episodes of the Sundara Kanda.

11. The Search of Ravana's Palace

Hanuman searches Ravana's palace and the surrounding places.

He sees many buildings.

But Sita is nowhere to be seen.

He continues to search.

Here, a difficult challenge comes before Hanuman – he must ensure that he does not mistake some other woman for Sita.

12. The Ashoka Vatika

Ultimately, Hanuman reaches the Ashoka Vatika.

There, he sees a woman in an extremely sorrowful state, surrounded by demonesses.

Hanuman understands that this is Sita.

But he does not go before her immediately.

He first observes the circumstance.

13. Sita's Condition

In the Sundara Kanda, Sita is described as being in a state of extreme sorrow and mental anguish.

She remembers Ram.

Ravana pressures her to accept his wish.

But Sita remains firm in her decision.

She does not accept Ravana, and maintains her loyalty toward Ram.

14. Hanuman's Caution

The greatest challenge before Hanuman now was how to approach Sita.

If he suddenly appeared before her, Sita might take him for some trick of the demons.

He therefore first uses language and signs that would establish Sita's trust.

This episode reveals Hanuman's psychological understanding and diplomatic intelligence.

15. Ram's Ring

Hanuman shows Sita Ram's ring, as identification.

This establishes the credibility of his message.

Sita understands that Hanuman is truly Ram's envoy.

This becomes an extremely important medium of communication between Ram and Sita.

16. Ram's Message

Hanuman tells Sita of Ram's condition.

He assures her that Ram is searching for her, and will soon attempt to free her.

This news seems extremely important to Sita.

After remaining in Ravana's captivity for a long time, she receives, for the first time, a direct message from Ram.

17. Sita's Message

Sita gives Hanuman her own message for Ram.

She tells him her condition and entreats Ram to come soon.

According to the Ramayana, Sita gives Hanuman her crest-jewel (chudamani), as identification.

This object becomes proof, for Ram, of Sita's message and her identity.

18. Hanuman's Return, or a Further Strategy?

Sita's location had now been found.

Hanuman's original task was complete.

Now the choice before him was – to return immediately, or to inspect the strength of Lanka.

Hanuman understands the circumstance and decides on the further course of action.

It is from this point that the next important stage of the Sundara Kanda begins.

19. An Important Distinction from a Research Standpoint

The story of Hanuman's crossing of the ocean and entry into Lanka is extremely famous in Indian religious and literary tradition.

But the identification of modern geographical locations connected with this episode should be viewed as a separate subject.

It would not be proper, from a research standpoint, to say of any modern site, without sufficient evidence, 'this is exactly the place.'

Wherever we find only religious tradition, we shall call it tradition.

Wherever independent historical or archaeological evidence exists, we shall present it separately, as evidence.

20. Caution Regarding Copyright

In this Part, too, the language of any modern translator has not been adopted verbatim.

The original narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana has been presented in our own words.

Wherever a different episode is found in later Ramayanas, it will, going forward, be kept separately in comparison.

This will keep the treatise both research-based, and free of unnecessary copyright problems.

21. Hanuman's Character

In this entire episode, several aspects of Hanuman's personality appear together –

strength – in crossing the ocean.

intelligence – in dealing with Surasa and other obstacles.

humility – in his conduct toward Mainaka.

strategy – in his secret entry into Lanka.

restraint – in awaiting the proper moment before Sita.

devotion and loyalty – in delivering Ram's message.

These very qualities establish Hanuman, going forward, as one of the most influential characters of the Ram narrative.

Conclusion

Hanuman crossed the ocean, entered Lanka, and, ultimately, found Sita in the Ashoka Vatika.

He gave her Ram's ring and reassured Sita that Ram had not forgotten her.

Sita, too, sent her message for Ram, giving him her crest-jewel.

Ram now knew for certain that Sita was in Lanka.

But Hanuman's task was not yet entirely complete.

He still had to inspect Lanka's strength, and to give a message that would make Ravana aware of Ram's capability.

In the Part that follows, we shall study Hanuman's further action at the Ashoka Vatika, Ravana's court, the burning of Lanka, and Hanuman's return to Ram.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, Hanuman's crossing of the ocean.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, the episodes of Mainaka, Surasa, and Simhika.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, entry into Lanka and the search for Sita.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, the meeting with Sita in the Ashoka Vatika.

5. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, the episode of Ram's ring and Sita's crest-jewel.

6. Later Ramayana and devotional traditions – for comparative study.

Part 6: Hanuman's Valour in Lanka, His Message in Ravana's Court, and the Burning of Lanka

In the previous Part, Hanuman crossed the ocean, entered Lanka, and found Sita in the Ashoka Vatika. He gave Sita Ram's ring, and Sita handed him her crest-jewel and her message for Ram.

The next question before Hanuman was — before delivering the news of Sita to Ram, should he also assess Lanka's strength and Ravana's arrangements?

This episode proceeds on the basis of the Sundara Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana.

1. Hanuman's Decision after Taking Leave of Sita

After his meeting with Sita, Hanuman decides not to return immediately, but to understand the strength of Lanka.

His purpose was not merely to display personal valour.

For Ram's campaign, it was also necessary to know how strong Lanka's security was, how great Ravana's military strength was, and what the enemy's response might be.

From this standpoint, Hanuman's further action can also be viewed as intelligence-gathering and strategic assessment.

2. Hanuman in the Ashoka Vatika

Hanuman causes extensive havoc in the Ashoka Vatika.

Damage is caused to the trees and the garden, and Lanka's guards come to stop him.

Conflict begins from here.

Hanuman confronts many demon warriors.

The poetic description of the Ramayana gives a detailed portrayal of his valour.

3. Conflict with the Guards

The warriors engaged in protecting the Ashoka Vatika attempt to capture Hanuman.

Hanuman confronts them with his strength and speed.

News spreads through Lanka, from his activity, that an extraordinary vanara has entered the city.

This also draws Ravana's attention to the event.

4. The Episode of Akshayakumara

Ravana sends his son Akshayakumara to fight Hanuman.

Battle takes place between Hanuman and Akshayakumara.

According to the Valmiki Ramayana, Hanuman defeats Akshayakumara in battle.

This episode reveals Hanuman's extraordinary skill in warfare.

5. The Arrival of Indrajit

After this, Ravana's son Indrajit comes to fight.

Indrajit is presented, in the Ramayana, as an extremely powerful warrior.

He uses a divine weapon to stop Hanuman.

Hanuman understands the circumstance, and deliberately allows himself to be conducted before Ravana.

Here, Hanuman's strategic intelligence is particularly visible.

6. Hanuman in Ravana's Court

Hanuman is presented before Ravana.

Ravana asks him who he is, and why he has come to Lanka.

Hanuman clearly introduces himself.

He describes himself as Ram's envoy.

He advises Ravana to send Sita back to Ram.

7. Ram's Message

Hanuman tells Ravana that it is not proper for him to keep Sita by force.

He warns him that returning Sita to Ram, respectfully, is the proper path for him.

Here, Hanuman appears not merely as a warrior, but as an envoy.

His purpose is also to attempt to persuade Ravana before war.

8. Ravana's Reaction

Ravana is angered by Hanuman's words.

He orders that he be punished.

At this very moment, Vibhishana intervenes.

He states that it is not proper to kill an envoy.

This episode brings forward an important principle connected with diplomacy and the protection of envoys.

9. Conduct toward an Envoy

In this episode of the Valmiki Ramayana, Vibhishana opposes the killing of the envoy.

Thereafter, rather than killing Hanuman, the decision is taken to bind cloth to his tail and set it aflame.

This is done at Ravana's order.

The demons believe this will be a humiliating punishment for Hanuman.

But this very decision, going forward, produces severe consequences for Lanka.

10. Hanuman's Burning of Lanka

Using his intelligence and speed, Hanuman frees himself from his bonds.

Through his burning tail, he spreads fire to many places in Lanka.

The Sundara Kanda gives an extremely detailed and powerful description of the burning of Lanka.

This episode became extremely popular in later Indian folk and devotional tradition.

11. The Meaning of the Burning of Lanka

It would not be sufficient to view the burning of Lanka merely as an event of physical destruction.

In the religious and poetic context of the Ramayana, it is also an episode that challenges the arrogance of Ravana's power.

A single envoy, who had reached the enemy's city in secret, ultimately becomes a challenge to the entire security arrangement of Lanka.

12. Concern for Sita's Safety

After the burning of Lanka, a concern arises in Hanuman's mind.

He wonders whether Sita may have suffered any harm because of the fire.

He goes again toward the Ashoka Vatika.

Seeing Sita safe, he feels relief.

This episode shows, alongside Hanuman's valour, his responsibility and sensitivity as well.

13. The Final Leave-Taking from Sita

Hanuman reassures Sita that Ram will soon come to free her.

Sita again gives her message.

Now Hanuman's principal purpose is complete – Sita's location has been found, Ram's message has been delivered, Sita's message and crest-jewel have been received, and an initial assessment of the strength of Lanka has also been made.

Now he has to return.

14. The Return Toward the Ocean

Hanuman reaches the shore of the ocean.

He prepares to cross the ocean in the same manner in which he had reached Lanka.

But now he carries extremely important news for Ram.

Sita is alive. She is in Lanka. And she awaits Ram's coming.

15. The Return to Ram

Crossing the ocean, Hanuman returns to the place where Angada, Jambavan, and other vanaras await him.

As soon as he returns, everyone understands that the campaign has succeeded.

Hanuman gives them news of Sita.

He has come bearing Sita's crest-jewel, for Ram.

16. News of Sita for Ram

When Hanuman reaches before Ram, he relates the entire event.

Ram learns that Sita is safe, and is in Lanka.

Sita has sent her message to Ram.

Hanuman hands the crest-jewel to Ram.

This is an emotional moment for Ram.

17. The Relationship of Ram and Hanuman

After this success of Hanuman, the relationship between Ram and Hanuman appears still deeper.

Hanuman delivered Ram's message, found Sita, brought back Sita's message, inspected the strength of Lanka, and, returning safely, gave the complete news.

In this way, he ceased to be merely a warrior.

He became Ram's most trusted envoy and ally.

18. Characteristics of Hanuman's Personality

This episode brings forward several of Hanuman's qualities –

intelligence – changing strategy according to circumstance.

courage – entering the enemy's city.

restraint – carefully establishing his identity before Sita.

diplomacy – attempting first to persuade Ravana.

loyalty – giving Ram's task the highest priority.

responsibility – concern for Sita's safety after the burning of Lanka.

These very qualities give Hanuman a unique place in Indian culture.

19. History and Religious Narrative

The burning of Lanka and Hanuman's sea-journey are important parts of the religious-literary narrative of the Ramayana.

Many sites connected with these events are mentioned in the local traditions of India and Sri Lanka.

But it would not be proper to declare any modern site historically proven merely on the basis of local belief.

In this treatise, we shall write clearly 'according to local tradition', and, wherever archaeological evidence is available, we shall present it separately.

This will preserve respect for both religious faith and history.

20. Different Ramayana Traditions

The Ram narrative was not confined to a single text.

Many traditions of the Ram narrative developed in various regions of India and of South and Southeast Asia.

Differences are found in some parts of the narrative among them.

It will therefore be necessary, when mentioning any episode, to make clear whether it is the account of the Valmiki Ramayana, or of some later Ramayana/folk tradition.

This is the honest method of research.

21. A Particular Caution Regarding Copyright

In this Part, too, the words of any modern author or translator have not been adopted verbatim.

An independent analysis of the ancient original narrative has been undertaken.

Wherever the views of modern researchers are necessary, their names and sources will be given separately.

Avoiding long modern quotations, and giving proper reference to original sources, will remain our policy throughout the treatise.

22. The Journey Ahead

Sita's location is now certain.

The next task before Ram is – to reach Lanka.

But before Ram and his army lies a great natural obstacle – the ocean.

Now the question arises – how will the vast vanara army cross the ocean?

It is from this point that the next great stage of the Ram narrative begins – dialogue with the ocean, the construction of the bridge, and the departure toward Lanka.

Conclusion

Hanuman's Lanka campaign is an extremely important stage of the narrative of the Ramayana.

He crossed the ocean, entered Lanka, found Sita, delivered Ram's message, and returned with Sita's message.

He also advised Ravana to avoid war.

But Ravana did not accept that warning.

Now the direction of the conflict was almost certain.

Ram had definite news of Sita.

Sugriva had an organized vanara army.

Hanuman had seen the way to Lanka.

Now the next stage was – Ram's army reaching the seashore, and the making of the way to Lanka.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, Hanuman's action in the Ashoka Vatika.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, the episodes of Akshayakumara and Indrajit.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, Hanuman in Ravana's court.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, Vibhishana's view regarding the killing of an envoy.

5. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, the burning of Lanka.

6. Valmiki Ramayana – Sundara Kanda, taking leave of Sita and the return to Ram.

7. Various Ramayana and folk traditions – for comparative study.

Part 7: Preparations for Ram Setu, Dialogue with the Ocean, and the Departure toward Lanka

In the previous Part, Hanuman returned to Ram with news of Sita. Ram now had definite news that Sita was in Lanka. Sugriva's vanara army was organized, and the way to reach Lanka had been found.

The Ram narrative now enters a new stage – Ram's army standing before the ocean, and the challenge of reaching Lanka.

The principal basis of this Part is the related narrative of the Yuddha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana. Where later traditions provide additional detail, these will be treated as distinct from the original narrative of Valmiki.

1. The Decision to Advance toward Lanka

After receiving news of Sita, Ram no longer wishes to delay.

The vanara army is advanced toward the south.

Ram, Lakshman, Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambavan, Angada, and many vanara warriors take part in this campaign.

Their goal is now clear – the freeing of Sita, and a decisive confrontation with Ravana.

2. The Vast Army before the Ocean

Ram's army reaches the shore of the ocean.

The vast ocean lies ahead.

For one person, crossing the ocean was one thing, but taking so vast an army across the ocean was an entirely different challenge.

Hanuman had already crossed the ocean, but a permanent route was necessary to take the entire army to Lanka.

3. Ram's Dialogue with the Ocean

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ram requests the ocean to grant a way.

Ram sits on the shore of the ocean and prays.

He expects the ocean to provide his army a way across.

But at first, no clear answer comes from the ocean.

This episode brings forward both Ram's patience and his resolve.

4. A Harsh Decision after Patience

When Ram feels that his prayer is receiving no answer, his anger becomes apparent.

He takes up his bow and arrow.

This form of Ram is a symbol not merely of compassion, but also of leadership capable of harsh decisions when necessary.

The ocean becomes afraid and, ultimately, appears before Ram, explaining his nature and his limits.

5. The Ocean's Answer

The ocean tells Ram that his nature is watery, and that he himself cannot entirely change his natural form.

But he suggests a means by which Ram's army may be given a way.

It is from this point that the name of Nala comes to the fore.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Nala is described as capable of constructing a bridge.

6. Nala's Role

Nala plays an important role in the vanara army.

The work of building a path across the ocean begins.

The vanaras bring great trees, rocks, and other material, and place them at the appointed place.

In the description of the Ramayana, this work is presented as an extremely vast and collective effort.

7. The Construction of Ram Setu

With the cooperation of the vanara army, the work of building a bridge across the ocean progresses.

This episode became extremely renowned, in Indian religious tradition, by the name of Ram Setu.

But a necessary distinction must be maintained here from a research standpoint.

In religious narrative, the Valmiki Ramayana describes the construction of a bridge by Ram's army in order to cross the ocean.

In modern geography, the shallow marine region situated between India and Sri Lanka is known by names such as Adam's Bridge / Ram Setu.

From a historical standpoint, establishing a direct historical connection between the present-day natural structure and the bridge described in the Ramayana is a separate subject of research.

We shall not, therefore, declare the two entirely identical without decisive evidence.

8. Collective Labour

The episode of the construction of the bridge conveys another important message.

Ram does not undertake this task alone.

Every section of the vanara army contributes according to its own capacity.

This brings forward the idea that –

a great purpose is achieved not merely by the strength of any one great individual, but also through collective effort.

9. Nala and Nila

In various traditions of the Ramayana, Nala and Nila are important characters connected with the construction of the bridge.

The Valmiki Ramayana particularly connects Nala with the capability for building the bridge.

Many popular stories relating to Nala and Nila developed in later folk traditions.

Here, it is necessary to keep the original source and later folk tales distinct.

10. The Army Crossing the Ocean

Once the bridge is completed, Ram's army crosses the ocean and advances toward Lanka.

Now Ram, Lakshman, and the vanara army have reached close to Lanka.

The stage of the search for Sita has come to an end.

Now begins – the Lanka campaign.

11. Ram's Army before Lanka

Ram's army reaches near Lanka.

It now becomes clear to Ravana that Ram is not confined merely to sending messages.

His army has, in fact, reached the gates of Lanka.

Before Ravana now lies a serious decision.

Will he return Sita? Or will he accept war?

12. Vibhishana's Policy

At this very moment, Ravana's brother Vibhishana gives him proper counsel.

Vibhishana's view is that Sita should be returned to Ram.

He explains to Ravana that unnecessary war could be catastrophic.

But Ravana remains firm in his arrogance and his decision.

13. Vibhishana's Opposition

Ravana does not accept Vibhishana's advice.

Disagreement between the two grows.

Ultimately, Vibhishana leaves Lanka.

He decides to take refuge with Ram.

This episode brings forward an important moral question of the Ramayana, going forward –

should the brother of an enemy be given refuge?

Ram's decision answers this question.

14. Vibhishana's Refuge

Vibhishana reaches Ram.

Some prominent members of the vanara army express doubt at his coming.

They fear that he might be a spy of Ravana.

Ram listens to everyone's words.

Then he decides to accept the person who has come seeking refuge.

15. Ram's Dharma of Refuge

Ram's celebrated principle comes to the fore – that he will accept whoever comes to him seeking refuge.

This episode became connected with the ideal of refuge and shelter within Indian religious tradition.

Ram accepts Vibhishana.

Later, Vibhishana gives Ram's army important information regarding Lanka.

16. Vibhishana's Role

Vibhishana becomes an important source of information regarding the internal circumstances of Lanka, for Ram's army.

He gives information about Ravana's nature, the arrangements of Lanka, and the principal warriors of the demon army.

In this way, Vibhishana's role becomes not merely that of a religious refugee, but also that of a strategic ally.

17. The Inevitability of War

Ram's army is before Lanka.

Vibhishana is with Ram.

Sita is still under Ravana's control.

Ravana is not prepared to return Sita.

Now, war between the two sides becomes almost inevitable.

18. A Historical Caution

Many claims are made in modern times regarding Ram Setu.

No claim will be presented in this treatise as historical truth without a source.

We must keep separate levels clear –

1. the literary/religious description of the Valmiki Ramayana. 2. later religious and folk traditions. 3. modern geographical and scientific study. 4. archaeological evidence. 5. the various views of historians.

It would not be proper to treat all of these as substitutes for one another.

19. Tradition and Evidence

In Sanatan tradition, Ram Setu is a matter of extreme reverence.

While respecting this religious importance, it is also necessary to maintain the criterion of evidence in the writing of history.

If evidence on a subject is not decisive, we shall state this clearly.

To treat faith as historical proof, and to treat history as opposed to faith – both are extremes.

Our purpose is to maintain a balanced and honest presentation between the two.

20. Caution Regarding Copyright

In this Part, too, the original narrative has not been taken verbatim from modern books.

An independent analysis has been undertaken of the ancient narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana.

Should the specific interpretation of any modern researcher be necessary going forward, it will be presented separately, with their name and reference.

No modern author's words will be presented as our own.

21. The Broad Message of This Part

The episode of Ram Setu is not merely an episode of a geographical journey.

It is also an example of resolve, leadership, collective effort, patience, and loyalty to purpose.

Hanuman alone crossed the ocean and found Sita.

Now, a way was made for the entire army to cross the ocean.

Thus, after individual courage, the need for collective strength comes to the fore.

Conclusion

Ram's army reached the ocean.

Ram prayed to the ocean for a way.

Under Nala's leadership, the work of building the bridge took place.

The army crossed the ocean and reached Lanka.

There, Vibhishana left Ravana's side and accepted Ram's refuge.

Ram gave him refuge.

Now Ram's army stood before Lanka, and Ravana had one last opportunity – to avoid war by returning Sita.

But Ravana did not do so.

The narrative now enters the decisive war of Lanka.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, the arrival of Ram's army at the seashore.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, the dialogue between Ram and the ocean.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, the episode of the construction of the bridge by Nala.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, Vibhishana's disagreement with Ravana.

5. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, Vibhishana's taking refuge with Ram.

6. Modern geographical and archaeological studies relating to Ram Setu – for comparative research.

Part 8: Ram's Army at the Gates of Lanka, Angada's Embassy, and the Final Preparation for War

In the previous Part, Ram's army had crossed the ocean and reached Lanka. Vibhishana left Ravana's side and accepted Ram's refuge. Now war lay ahead, but Ram's policy was not to begin war immediately. First, Ravana was given a final opportunity to return Sita respectfully.

The principal basis of this Part is the related narrative of the Yuddha Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana. Wherever later traditions provide additional detail, it is necessary to keep this distinct from the original narrative of Valmiki.

1. Ram's Army before Lanka

After crossing the ocean, Ram's army reaches near Lanka.

The vanara army is present there in vast numbers. Ram, Lakshman, Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambavan, Angada, and Vibhishana are now ready for the decisive confrontation.

On the other side, in Lanka, Ravana prepares for war with his army and principal warriors.

Now, a state of conflict has arisen between the two sides.

2. Ram's Policy

Waging war alone was not Ram's purpose.

Sita's freedom was his principal goal.

Had Ravana returned Sita, war could have been avoided.

For this very reason, the path of dialogue and warning is adopted before war.

This is an important moral aspect of the Ram narrative –

giving an opportunity for peace before war.

3. A Final Opportunity for Ravana

An attempt is made, on Ram's side, to persuade Ravana and to have Sita returned.

Ravana is told that Ram does not desire unnecessary war.

But his decision to keep Sita under his own authority has become the root cause of the entire conflict.

Ravana remains firm in his obstinacy.

4. Angada Becomes an Envoy

On Ram's side, Angada is sent as an envoy to Ravana's court.

Angada is the son of Vali.

This embassy of his holds particular importance, for that same Ram, because of whom his father had died, now trusts Angada and makes him his representative.

Angada reaches Lanka's royal court, bearing Ram's message.

5. Angada in Ravana's Court

Angada places Ram's message before Ravana.

He explains to him that returning Sita is the proper course.

Angada is not afraid of Ravana's power.

He states, in clear words, that Ram's army has reached Lanka, and that the time has now come for Ravana to accept the consequences.

6. Ravana's Arrogance

Ravana does not accept Angada's words.

He expresses confidence in his own power and his warriors.

Here, in the Ramayana, Ravana's character comes to the fore as that of a ruler who places excessive trust in his own power, and who does not accept proper counsel either.

Many opportunities come before him, but he does not step back from his decision.

7. Angada's Challenge

An impactful episode occurs in the Valmiki Ramayana, in which Angada demonstrates his power.

He plants his foot in the assembly and challenges Ravana's warriors to move it.

No one is able to move it easily.

This episode becomes a symbol of the confidence of Ram's army and of Angada's valour.

8. The Purpose of the Envoy

Angada's purpose was not merely to display power.

His principal task was – to persuade Ravana, one last time.

But when Ravana is not prepared for a settlement, it becomes clear that halting the war is difficult.

In this way, the final stage of the diplomatic effort, too, comes to an end.

9. Preparation for War

Angada returns to Ram.

He informs him that Ravana has refused to return Sita.

Now Ram's army prepares for war.

The vanara army is organized in various directions.

For the defence of Lanka, Ravana, too, appoints his principal warriors at various positions.

10. The Security of Lanka

The Valmiki Ramayana describes the various gates of Lanka and their security arrangements.

Ravana appoints his principal warriors at important positions.

This makes clear that Lanka is portrayed not merely as an ordinary city, but as an organized and secure capital.

11. Ram and Vibhishana

Vibhishana is now with Ram.

He gives information regarding the internal arrangements of Lanka and Ravana's principal warriors.

This information is strategically useful for Ram.

An important point comes to the fore here once again – trust toward the person who has taken refuge, and the proper use of his knowledge.

12. Ravana's Principal Warriors

Many powerful warriors, from the side of Lanka, prepare for war.

Among them, Indrajit, Kumbhakarna, Prahasta, Atikaya, and other warriors play an important role.

The story of each of these comes to the fore, going forward, in different stages of the war.

13. The Principal Warriors of Ram's Army

On Ram's side, too, many principal vanara commanders are ready.

Among them, Hanuman, Sugriva, Angada, Jambavan, Nala, Nila, and others are prominent.

Thus, both sides possess their own experienced and powerful warriors.

14. The Final Situation before War

The circumstance is now clear.

Sita is in Lanka.

Ram's army is before Lanka.

Ravana is not prepared to return Sita.

Angada's final embassy, too, has not succeeded.

The path of dialogue has now almost come to an end.

War is about to begin.

15. The Distinction between History and Narrative

An important research caution is necessary regarding this episode.

It would not be proper to treat all the details of the war described in the Ramayana as proven, in the manner of events of modern military history.

We shall first present them as the narrative of the Valmiki Ramayana.

If independent archaeological, epigraphic, or other historical evidence is available in support of any event, it will be presented separately.

16. The Identification of Lanka

On the question of the identification of Lanka, Indian tradition generally connects it with present-day Sri Lanka.

But equating the geography described in ancient texts with modern political boundaries requires caution from a research standpoint.

In this treatise, wherever disagreement exists among scholars, we shall not declare any single view final truth.

Traditional identification and modern historical research will both be presented separately.

17. The Moral Question of War in the Ram Narrative

Before the beginning of war, Ram sought a peaceful resolution of the problem on several occasions.

The search for Sita was undertaken with Sugriva's help.

Hanuman was made an envoy, and the message was delivered.

Vibhishana, too, gave Ravana proper advice.

Ultimately, Angada, too, was sent as an envoy.

Despite all these efforts, Ravana did not return Sita.

In this sequence, war is presented, within the narrative, as the final alternative.

18. A Careful Presentation of Ravana's Side as Well

In a research treatise, it is also necessary to avoid one-sided language regarding Ravana.

In the Ramayana, Ravana is also described as an extremely powerful, learned, and ascetic king, but his character comes into serious moral crisis because of the abduction of Sita and the decision not to return her.

It would therefore be more proper to keep the different aspects of his personality distinct.

One virtue of a person does not make all his deeds proper, and one fault does not make all his virtues false.

19. The Research Method of This Treatise

Our method going forward in this treatise will remain the same –

wherever evidence exists, we shall present it as evidence.

wherever tradition exists, we shall state it as tradition.

wherever historians disagree, we shall give both views separately.

wherever evidence is insufficient, we shall write clearly that a decisive conclusion is not available.

wherever the identification of a modern site is disputed, we shall not write it as a settled fact.

This method will keep the treatise reliable over the long term.

20. Caution Regarding Copyright

As with the entire treatise, in this Part too, the language of any modern translation or book has not been adopted verbatim.

An independent analysis, in our own words, has been undertaken of the original ancient narrative.

Should mention of any modern researcher's specific view be necessary going forward, it will be kept separate, with reference.

This will preserve original writing, proper reference, and copyright caution, all three.

Conclusion

In Chapter 8, we have viewed, in sequence, the narrative from Shri Ram's forest journey to Kishkindha, friendship with Sugriva,

the slaying of Vali, the search for Sita, Hanuman's Lanka campaign, the meeting with Sita, the burning of Lanka, the construction of the bridge across the ocean, and Vibhishana's taking of refuge.

After Angada's final embassy, the path to avoiding war has now almost come to an end.

Ram's army stands before Lanka.

Ravana is prepared for war.

The next chapter may now be centred upon the war at Lanka.

And there, too, we shall maintain particular caution – which description belongs to the Valmiki Ramayana, which to later tradition, and what evidence is available at the level of modern history – these three will not be merged together.

Source Basis

1. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, the arrival of Ram's army near Lanka.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, Angada's going to Ravana's court as an envoy.

3. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, the dialogue between Ravana and Angada.

4. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, the preparation for war at Lanka and the description of its principal warriors.

5. Valmiki Ramayana – Yuddha Kanda, Vibhishana's role.

6. Various Ramayana traditions – for comparative study.

CHAPTER 9

The Place of Ayodhya in the Civilization and Culture of Ancient India

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Part 1: Ayodhya – The Ancient Memory of Indian Civilization and Cultural Continuity

To understand the ancient civilization of India, the history of dynasties and wars alone is not sufficient. The true character of Indian civilization was built from those cities, rivers, pilgrimage sites, hermitages, religious traditions, trade routes, and literary memories that influenced the cultural life of society for thousands of years. Within this broad tradition, the place of Ayodhya appears extremely important.

Situated on the bank of the Sarayu, Ayodhya is among the most celebrated ancient cities in Indian religious and cultural memory. The Ramayana and the Puranas connect it with the Ikshvaku and Solar dynasty royal tradition, while in Buddhist and Jain literature, an important mention of the name Saketa is found for this same broad region. In modern historiography, discussion has occurred, at various levels, regarding the relationship between Ayodhya and

Saketa; it would not, therefore, be sufficient to view this subject solely from a religious tradition, or solely from a modern political standpoint.

1. Ayodhya: A Cultural Concept Beyond a City

The importance of Ayodhya lies not merely in the fact that it appears in literature as an ancient city. Its importance also lies in the fact that many traditions of Indian society are connected with it.

Different kinds of memories of Ayodhya and the surrounding region are found in Vedic and post-Vedic literature, the Ramayana, the Puranas, Buddhist texts, Jain tradition, and later pilgrimage literature. The nature of these sources, too, is not identical. Some are religious and poetic, some provide historical-social information, and some are based on the direct experience of travellers.

It is therefore necessary to place before us an important historical principle when studying the history of Ayodhya – the tradition of religious texts should be read as a religious-cultural source, archaeology as material evidence, and historiography as critical analysis. It would not be proper to treat these three as complete substitutes for one another.

2. The Memory of Ayodhya in Vedic Literature

In discussions of Ayodhya's antiquity, the Atharvaveda is particularly mentioned. In a verse of the Atharvaveda occurs the name 'Ayodhya', connected with the simile of a city built by the gods. Modern scholars have counted this mention among the important pieces of evidence for the ancient literary presence of the name Ayodhya.

But caution is necessary here. The occurrence of a city's name in a Vedic text does not automatically prove every historical layer of that city's modern geographical location. For this, a comparative study of literary context, linguistic study, archaeological material, and geographical continuity is necessary.

This is why, in this book, we are attempting to understand the antiquity of Ayodhya through a multi-source method, rather than establishing it on the basis of any single piece of evidence.

3. The Ramayana and Ayodhya

The broadest form of the cultural identity of Ayodhya was given by the Valmiki Ramayana. In the Ramayana, Ayodhya is presented as the capital of the kingdom of Kosala and the centre of King Dasharatha's reign. The narrative of Ram's birth, his childhood, Dasharatha's reign, Ram's departure for the forest, and his return to Ayodhya gave this city an extraordinary place in Indian cultural consciousness.

The Ramayana is not merely the story of a dynasty. Within it appear many social ideals – the relationship between king and subjects, family and rajadharma, the keeping of one's word, justice, sacrifice, brotherhood, the dignity of women, the relationship between forest and city, and the broad meaning of dharma.

For this reason, the identity of Ayodhya has not remained that of a mere geographical city alone. It also became a symbol of the Indian conception of an ideal state and of propriety.

However, disagreement exists among scholars regarding the composition of the Ramayana and the dating of its various texts. It would not, therefore, be a scientific method of history to treat every event described in the Ramayana, in the modern sense, as a contemporary royal record. On the other hand, the continuation of the literary memory of a city and royal tradition over so long a period is also an important fact for the study of Indian cultural history.

4. Kosala, Ayodhya, and Saketa

In ancient Indian political geography, Kosala held particular importance. In Buddhist literature, Kosala appears as a principal Mahajanapada. Within this tradition, mention is found of Saketa. Modern scholars have long considered the relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya. Some scholars connect the two with the

same city, or a single developing urban tradition, while historical study exercises caution regarding the gradual change of names and urban traditions.

It is necessary to understand an important point here. The historical relationship between the names 'Saketa' and 'Ayodhya' is a subject of research, but it would also not be proper, on that basis, to reject the religious tradition of Ayodhya. Similarly, determining an archaeological chronology on the basis of religious tradition alone would also not be proper.

From a historical standpoint, the better method is to view together the names available in literature, their geographical indications, the accounts of travellers, inscriptions, and archaeological material.

5. Ayodhya in Buddhist and Jain Traditions

The ancient cultural character of Ayodhya was not confined to the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition alone. This region also finds an important place in Buddhist and Jain literature.

According to a modern research study, the Ayodhya region has been connected with the name Saketa in Buddhist sources, and with names such as Vinita in Jain tradition. In these traditions, Ayodhya is viewed as an important region of religious activity.

This brings forward a second picture of ancient Ayodhya – a cultural region in which different religious traditions came into

contact. This fact helps us understand that feature of Indian civilization in which the identity of a city, over time, does not remain confined to a single religious community, but continues to incorporate the memories of many traditions.

6. What Does Archaeology Tell Us?

The importance of archaeology in the study of the ancient history of Ayodhya increases, for combining literary traditions with material evidence makes it possible to construct a more balanced picture of history.

Among the archaeological material obtained from the Ayodhya region, mention is found of the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) tradition. In Indian archaeology, this material is regarded as important in the study of early urbanization and the urban centres developing after the Iron Age. Ayodhya has been included in the list of archaeological sites connected with NBPW.

Reports of the archaeological excavation conducted at the disputed site in 2003 also mention various cultural layers and many kinds of antiquities, including NBPW. Disagreement has existed among historians and archaeologists regarding the interpretation of these archaeological findings. It would not, therefore, be proper to connect any archaeological object directly with a specific historical person or event. This same scientific

standpoint will remain the foundation of the research method of this book.

7. The Civilization of Ayodhya: The Question of Continuity

The most interesting question in relation to Ayodhya is whether the cultural identity of a city can remain continuous across several distinct historical periods.

Like many ancient cities of India, Ayodhya, too, has remained inhabited into modern times. In such cities, new settlements continue to develop on top of old ones. The material of old buildings is reused, and old structures are also destroyed by natural and human causes.

It is therefore not necessary that evidence of the continuity of an ancient city always be found in the form of a single magnificent ancient building. Sometimes, its continuity appears together in literary memory, in the river and geography, in the pilgrimage tradition, in local place-names, in archaeological strata, in the accounts of travellers, in inscriptions, and in popular memory.

It seems more proper to study Ayodhya from precisely this multi-layered standpoint.

Conclusion of Part 1

The place of Ayodhya in ancient Indian civilization cannot be determined by any single period or any single text. The mention

relating to Ayodhya in Vedic literature, the vast cultural tradition of the Ramayana, the historical memories of Kosala-Saketa, Buddhist-Jain literature, and archaeological material – all of these together point toward the multidimensional past of Ayodhya.

But the nature of all these sources differs. It is, therefore, the researcher's responsibility to undertake a critical examination of the evidence while respecting faith.

Understanding Ayodhya is not merely knowing who ruled here; it is also understanding how Indian society, over thousands of years, viewed this city as a centre of memory, religion, literature, politics, and culture.

References

1. Atharvaveda, Kanda 10, Sukta 2 – mention relating to Ayodhya.

2. Valmiki Ramayana – the Ayodhya Kanda and related Kandas.

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6. Julia Shaw, "Ayodhya's sacred landscape: ritual memory, politics and archaeological 'fact'," Antiquity, 2015.

7. Studies relating to Northern Black Polished Ware in Indian archaeology.

Part 2: Ayodhya, Kosala, and Ancient Indian Urban Civilization

1. The Political Background of Kosala

The place of Kosala in the political history of ancient India has been important. Kosala is counted among the principal Mahajanapadas in Buddhist literature, and its political life is connected with cities such as Shravasti and Saketa. On the other hand, the tradition of the Ramayana presents Ayodhya as the capital of Kosala and the principal centre of the Ikshvaku/Solar-dynasty royal tradition.

Reading these two kinds of sources together, the history of Ayodhya appears connected with a long cultural tradition, but it would not be proper to treat their periods and details as identical to one another.

It is also necessary to keep in mind, in historical study, that additional evidence is required to treat the royal Ayodhya of the Ramayana and the urban system described in the Buddhist-period political geography as one and the same administrative form directly. That is, tradition provides a continuous cultural memory, while the historian attempts to understand its different periods separately on the basis of available sources.

2. The Urban Life Visible in the Ramayana

The most detailed literary portrayal of the urban description of Ayodhya is found in the Valmiki Ramayana. In the Ramayana, Ayodhya is portrayed as a vast, well-organized, and prosperous city. The city contains descriptions of highways, gates, markets, buildings, the royal palace, craftsmen, soldiers, and various kinds of social groups.

The modern scholar Dieter Schlingloff, in his study of ancient Indian cities, has presented the Ramayana's description of Ayodhya as a literary example of urban life. In his study, elements such as organized main roads, highways, markets, craftsmen, and a military system are mentioned in connection with the Ayodhya of the Ramayana.

This description brings forward an important concept of the ideal city of that time. The city was not merely the king's residence. It was the combined centre of royal power, trade, craft, military strength, religious life, and social organization. This is extremely important for the study of Indian urban civilization.

3. Highways and Markets

To understand the economic power of any ancient city, the study of its markets and routes is necessary. The description of Ayodhya in the Ramayana mentions highways and markets. This indicates that Ayodhya was envisioned not merely as a religious city, but also as an organized urban centre.

Highways were not merely a means of transport. Through them, the movement of the king and envoys, military activity, the transport of trade goods, the movement of travellers, religious journeys, and cultural contact between various regions were made possible. From this standpoint, it is useful to view Ayodhya as an ancient North Indian cultural contact zone.

But caution is necessary here as well. It would not be proper to treat the ideal urban picture described in the Ramayana directly as the map of an actual city of any one archaeological period. In epic literature, the description of a city may express both literary ideal and cultural memory.

4. Craftsmen and the System of Production

The role of craftsmen in the economy of ancient Indian cities was extremely important. The description of Ayodhya in the Ramayana mentions various kinds of artisans and occupational groups. This shows that urban society was formed not merely of king, soldiers, and priests, but that many productive classes were also active within it.

In a developed city, economic activities such as metalwork, textile manufacture, jewellery-making, pottery, woodwork, construction, chariot-building, and the production of everyday items were generally important. Independent archaeological or epigraphic evidence would be required to state definitively that any particular

occupation existed in Ayodhya at a particular period. In this book, therefore, literary mention and direct archaeological evidence should be kept distinct. This is the caution of research.

5. Ayodhya and the Agriculture-Based Economy

Ancient Indian cities were not separate from their surrounding rural regions. Food, livestock, raw material, and other necessary items for the large population living in the city came from the rural economy. In exchange, the city provided finished goods, services, and a market to the rural regions.

Therefore, in understanding Ayodhya, it is not sufficient to look only at the city's boundary walls or the royal palace. The entire rural and river-based geographical region behind Ayodhya was also important.

The river Sarayu holds particular importance in this context. The river did not influence religious imagination alone; it must also have influenced human settlement, agriculture, the use of water, and the possibilities of transport. However, the conclusion as to how much trade occurred via the Sarayu in any particular period should be drawn only on the basis of separate evidence.

6. The Sarayu and the Cultural Economy of Ayodhya

In the ancient civilization of India, rivers were not merely water sources. They were the axis of civilization. Cities developed along

the banks of rivers, agriculture flourished, pilgrimage sites were formed, journeys took place, religious traditions developed, and contact was established among various regions.

In relation to Ayodhya, the importance of the Sarayu is extremely extensive in religious literature. In later religious traditions, bathing in the Sarayu, pilgrimage, and the various pilgrimage sites of Ayodhya further strengthened the city's religious identity. Thus, the cultural geography of Ayodhya did not remain confined to the boundary of the city; the Sarayu and the pilgrimage sites connected with it also became part of its identity.

7. Ayodhya and Social Life

Society in ancient Indian cities was formed of many levels. Besides the king and the royal family, many classes played a role in social life – priests, scholars, soldiers, merchants, farmers, craftsmen, servants, travellers, ascetics, and religious groups.

Particular emphasis on social discipline and rajadharma is visible in the description of Ayodhya in the Ramayana. The relationship between king and subjects is also presented here in an ideal form. Through the character of Ram, the idea that a ruler's personal interest should not take precedence over the interest of his subjects became extremely influential in later Indian culture. For this reason, the concept of 'Ram Rajya' did not remain merely the name of an ancient royal system in Indian political-cultural

thought; it developed as an ideal of just and welfare-oriented governance.

8. Ayodhya: The Meeting of Dharma and Royal Power

Another distinctive feature of Ayodhya is that the concepts of dharma and royal power appear, in literature, deeply connected with one another. Dasharatha's reign, rajadharma, the honouring of sages, the yajna tradition, and the observance of dharma in Ram's life – all these episodes influence the cultural image of Ayodhya.

But it is necessary here, too, for the historian to keep two levels distinct. The first level is literary and religious ideal. The second level is the actual form of historical royal institutions. The Ramayana gives us extremely important material for understanding the concepts of ancient Indian rajadharma, but it is not possible, from it, to determine the actual form of every administrative institution. The Ramayana will therefore be used, in this book, as a cultural and literary source, and, wherever administrative history is discussed, the help of other sources will be taken.

9. Buddhist-Period Northern India and Ayodhya

By the Buddhist period, the process of urbanization in northern India appears more clearly. Many prosperous cities are described

in Buddhist and Jain literature. Kosala and its related cities were important within this broad urban world.

Historians have long discussed the relationship between Ayodhya and Saketa. Some scholars have connected Saketa with Ayodhya, while serious questions have also been raised regarding this identification in older studies. For example, W. Vost, discussing the identification of Saketa in detail in 1905, stated that the question of its location, and its similarity with Ayodhya, was not simple.

Later studies have viewed the Ayodhya-Saketa relationship in a broader historical context. The conclusion of this book, therefore, will not be that 'Saketa = Ayodhya' is an undisputed fact. Rather, the more cautious conclusion will be that there has been considerable discussion among scholars regarding the historical relationship between Ayodhya and Saketa, and that understanding this relationship requires a comparative study of literary, archaeological, and historical sources.

10. Ayodhya and Early Urbanization

In archaeology, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) is regarded as an important artefact tradition in the study of early historical urbanization. Research literature mentions the finding of such archaeological material from the Ayodhya region. This indicates

that the study of a developing urban culture in the early historical period is possible in this region.

But the presence of NBPW does not, in itself, prove that the entire city of that time was the same Ayodhya described in the Ramayana. Here, too, we must keep three levels distinct — the archaeological culture, the historical city, and the Ayodhya of the epic. A relationship may exist among these three, but separate evidence is required to prove each relationship.

11. The Cultural Influence of Ayodhya

The influence of Ayodhya did not remain merely local. With the expansion of the Ram narrative, the memory of Ayodhya reached many regions of India. In later centuries, the various linguistic and regional traditions of the Ramayana re-established Ayodhya within their own respective cultural worlds.

In this way, Ayodhya became a cultural symbol — connected with many ideas such as Ram, propriety, dharma, ideal governance, sacrifice, family, and public welfare. This is why the history of Ayodhya is not merely local history. It is also an important chapter in the history of the memory of Indian civilization.

12. A Balance between History and Tradition

The greatest challenge in writing about Ayodhya is precisely how religious tradition and historical research are to be held together.

If only religious texts are considered, archaeological and historical questions may remain incomplete. If only modern archaeological interpretation is considered, thousands of years of religious and cultural memory may be neglected.

For this reason, the foundation of the research method of this treatise will be – 'respect for faith, examination of evidence, and the fair presentation of disagreements.' This balanced perspective is more useful for understanding the antiquity of Ayodhya.

The scholar Hans Bakker's detailed study of Ayodhya, too, does not confine the history of this city to a single event, but studies its long-term development and the process of its emergence as a sacred centre.

Conclusion of Part 2

Viewing Ayodhya in the context of ancient Indian civilization, it becomes clear that its identity is formed of many layers. On the one hand is the Ayodhya of the Ramayana – the cultural memory of rajadharma, propriety, and ideal governance. On the other is Kosala and early historical northern India – where city, state, trade, and social organization developed. On the third side is archaeological Ayodhya – where an attempt is made to understand the city's development on the basis of the remains of the material cultures of various periods. And on the fourth side is

pilgrimage-Ayodhya – which developed, in later centuries, as a great centre of religious journeys and devotion to Ram.

Viewing all four together, the real importance of Ayodhya comes to the fore. Ayodhya is not merely a city of the past; it is a bridge among the memory, literature, religion, politics, and cultural continuity of Indian civilization.

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Part 3: The Cultural Exchange and Religious Plurality of Ayodhya

1. Ayodhya: A Land of Memory for Many Religious Traditions

The cultural history of Ayodhya has not remained confined to a single religious tradition. The study of ancient and medieval sources indicates that Ayodhya and its surrounding region have remained connected with the memories of various religious traditions.

In Brahmanical tradition, Ayodhya was connected with the Ikshvaku dynasty, Lord Shri Ram, and the Solar-dynasty royal tradition. In Buddhist literature, the Saketa and Kosala regions are mentioned. In Jain tradition, Ayodhya was established as the birthplace of many Tirthankaras.

The importance of these traditions is not merely a matter of religious belief. Through them, we are helped to understand how the identity of an ancient city is formed, over time, by the memories of various religious communities. It is, therefore, more proper to view Ayodhya not merely as a single religious centre, but as a multi-layered centre of Indian cultural memory.

2. Saketa and Ayodhya in Buddhist Tradition

Saketa is mentioned in Buddhist literature as an important city. Both Shravasti and Saketa are mentioned in the context of the Kosala Mahajanapada.

Here, an important question has faced historians – were the ancient Saketa and Ayodhya the same city, or were the two separate cities? There has not been complete agreement among scholars on this question.

In nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century studies, some scholars exercised serious caution regarding the identification of Saketa and Ayodhya. On the other hand, later studies explained the historical relationship of the two in different ways.

This book will not, therefore, state, without sufficient evidence, that 'Saketa and Ayodhya were, in every period, definitely the same city.' The more balanced conclusion is that the Saketa-Ayodhya relationship is an important subject of research in ancient Indian history, which should be understood through a comparative study of literary, archaeological, and geographical sources.

Evidence of disagreement over this identification is found in earlier studies; for example, differing views regarding the identification of Saketa and Ayodhya are also visible in the discourse of the time of the archaeologist Alexander Cunningham.

3. Buddhism and the Cultural World of Kosala

The importance of Kosala in Buddhist tradition is extremely great. In the time of the Buddha, Kosala held a place among the principal political regions of northern India. Buddhist texts mention Kosala's King Prasenajit, who is celebrated as a ruler contemporary with the Buddha.

An important historical distinction must be understood here. The mention of Kosala and Saketa in Buddhist literature does not prove that Ayodhya's religious identity, at that time, was the same as it appears in the later tradition of devotion to Ram. Rather, it helps us understand that this entire region was, even at that time, an important region of political, social, and religious activity. In this way, Buddhist sources provide a different perspective on the history of Ayodhya.

4. Ayodhya in Jain Tradition

Ayodhya also holds an extremely important place in the Jain religious tradition. According to Jain tradition, five Tirthankaras are held to be connected with Ayodhya – Rishabhadeva (Adinatha), Ajitanatha, Abhinandananatha, Sumatinatha, and Anantanatha.

In Jain tradition, Ayodhya is accorded the standing of the birthplace of these Tirthankaras. This tradition is an important aspect of the religious identity of Ayodhya, which generally receives less space in a history centred on the Ram narrative.

This also makes clear that the religious memory of Ayodhya was not confined to Vaishnavism or devotion to Ram alone. In the pilgrimage tradition of Jainism, Ayodhya was connected with both the Ikshvaku tradition and the birthplace of the Tirthankaras.

5. Ayodhya and the Ikshvaku Tradition: Two Religious Memories

An extremely interesting cultural parallel appears here. In the Brahmanical-Ramayana tradition, Ayodhya is connected with the Ikshvaku dynasty and Lord Ram. In Jain tradition, too, many Tirthankaras are regarded as connected with the Ikshvaku dynasty.

That is, one and the same ancient dynastic memory appears to take on different religious meanings in different religious traditions. This brings forward an important characteristic of Indian civilization – the same cultural geography could be incorporated by different religious traditions into their own respective spiritual narratives. It is not sufficient to view this merely as competition. Often, this may also be a process of shared cultural memory and reinterpretation.

6. Ayodhya in Brahmanical Tradition

In Brahmanical literature, the identity of Ayodhya became connected chiefly with Kosala, the Ikshvaku dynasty, the Solar dynasty, and the Ram narrative. The Valmiki Ramayana made Ayodhya the capital of Dasharatha and the principal centre of

Ram's life. Later Puranas and pilgrimage-glorification literature extended this religious memory still further.

The sanctity of Ayodhya was not connected with the birth of Ram alone, but became connected with many memories — Ram's childhood, Dasharatha's reign, Ram's departure for the forest, Bharat's sacrifice, Ram's return, Ram's coronation, and Ram Rajya. In this way, the religious geography of Ayodhya became not a single event, but the comprehensive territory of many episodes of the Ram narrative.

7. The Ayodhya-Mahatmya and the Pilgrimage Tradition

Traditions such as the Ayodhya-Mahatmya hold particular importance in the religious development of Ayodhya. The purpose of pilgrimage-glorification literature is not merely to describe historical events. Its purpose is also to establish the religious importance, pilgrimage sites, bathing, worship, and religious rituals of a place.

The scholar Hans Bakker has undertaken a detailed study of the history of Ayodhya and its development as a pilgrimage centre. In his study, the traditions of Ram-worship connected with the Ayodhya-Mahatmya and the Agastya-samhita are regarded as important in the context of the religious development of Ayodhya. This indicates that the present pilgrimage-image of Ayodhya was

not suddenly created at any one time, but that long-running religious-cultural processes lay behind it.

8. The Expansion of Devotion to Ram

The Ram narrative is ancient, but the historical development of organized, Ram-centred devotional traditions occurred in different stages. In the Ramayana, Ram is presented as an ideal king and a man devoted to dharma. In later religious literature, Ram's form develops still more clearly as God and as an object of worship. Then, in medieval devotional literature, devotion to Ram took on a widespread popular-cultural form. In this sequence, the Vaishnav devotional traditions of northern India made an important contribution.

9. Ramananda and the Tradition of Devotion to Ram

In discussing the history of devotion to Ram in northern India, the name of Swami Ramananda holds particular importance. But disagreement exists among scholars regarding Ramananda's lifetime, his biography, and his historical form.

J. N. Farquhar, considering Ramananda's historical position, made clear that a historical examination of the traditional accounts relating to his period and life is necessary. Later studies, too, have paid attention to the distinction between the traditions available regarding Ramananda and historical evidence.

This book will not, therefore, state that every traditional account relating to Ramananda is historically undisputed. But it is important that the Ramanandi tradition played a major role in the spread of Ram-centred Vaishnav devotion in northern India. Modern scholarly study views Ayodhya as an important pilgrimage centre of the Ramanandi tradition.

10. Ayodhya and the Vaishnav Ascetic Tradition

Over time, many Vaishnav monasteries, temples, and ascetic traditions developed in Ayodhya. In particular, the Ramanandi ascetic tradition gave Ayodhya a place among its principal religious centres.

According to the scholar William R. Pinch, various streams such as Tyagi, Naga, and Rasik are visible within the tradition of Ramanandi ascetics, and, in the modern period, Ayodhya has been a principal centre of the Ramanandi pilgrimage tradition.

It is necessary to keep in mind here that the present form of the Ramanandi tradition cannot be applied to every period of ancient Ayodhya. This is a later historical development, which should be understood within its own period.

11. Religious Plurality and Cultural Coexistence

The history of Ayodhya gives us an opportunity to understand a broad aspect of Indian civilization. Different traditions could

develop, with their own religious meanings, within the same cultural region – Ram and the Ikshvaku dynasty in Brahmanical tradition; the Tirthankaras and the Ikshvaku tradition in Jain tradition; the political-cultural world of Kosala and Saketa in Buddhist literature; devotion to Ram and pilgrimage in later Vaishnav traditions. Viewing all of these together brings forward the cultural complexity of Ayodhya.

12. Traditions Changed, but the Memory of Ayodhya Remained

The distinctive feature of Ayodhya is that, across different historical periods, its religious interpretations kept changing, but the city's memory did not end. Sometimes it appears connected with the memory of a royal city, sometimes with the political world of Saketa and Kosala, sometimes with Jain pilgrimage tradition, sometimes with the Ram narrative, and, in later times, as a vast pilgrimage centre of devotion to Ram. This process can be understood both as cultural continuity and as cultural reinterpretation.

13. The Transformation of Ayodhya into a Pilgrimage City

An important stage in the religious history of Ayodhya is its development as a pilgrimage city. The economy of a pilgrimage city does not depend on religious rituals alone. With the arrival of pilgrims, activities such as rest-houses, monasteries, temples, markets, eateries, transport, religious literature, ritual materials, and

local services develop. In this way, religious faith gradually influences the social and economic structure of the city as well. In studying the modern religious geography of Ayodhya, scholars have paid particular attention to this pilgrimage-centred development.

14. Ayodhya: Memory, Pilgrimage, and Identity

Ancient buildings alone do not play a role in making a place sacred. Narrative, memory, pilgrimage, ritual, journeys, and local tradition together form the religious identity of a place. Ayodhya is an important example of this. The Ram narrative gave shape to its cultural memory. Pilgrimage-glorification literature organized its religious geography. Ascetic and monastic traditions strengthened its religious institutions. Pilgrims connected it with the broad Indian society. In this way, the identity of Ayodhya has been a continuously developing cultural process.

15. The Most Important Caution for the Historian

The most difficult task when writing about Ayodhya is deciding what should be called tradition, and what a historically proven fact. For example, if a religious text describes a place as the birthplace of Shri Ram, this is important evidence of that text's religious tradition. But archaeological and architectural evidence would be required to establish the date of any specific structure. Similarly, the popularity of a pilgrimage site does not, by itself,

prove that that very pilgrimage site existed in that same form thousands of years ago. It is precisely this distinction that will give this book, distinct from an ordinary religious book, the form of a research-based treatise.

16. The Multi-Layered Cultural Identity of Ayodhya

Ayodhya can be understood in terms of four principal cultural layers – first, ancient literary Ayodhya, that is, the Ayodhya described in the Ramayana and other literature; second, historical Kosala and Saketa, that is, traditions relating to the political and urban world of the Buddhist period; third, Jain religious Ayodhya, that is, the birthplace of the Tirthankaras and the Jain pilgrimage tradition; and fourth, the pilgrimage-Ayodhya of devotion to Ram, that is, the religious city developed from later Vaishnav, Ramanandi, and pilgrimage-glorification traditions. Viewing these four separately, on the basis of their different periods and sources, the history of Ayodhya appears far clearer and more balanced.

Conclusion of Part 3

The cultural journey of Ayodhya is not the story of a single religion, a single text, or a single period. It is the story of a city whose memory remained preserved, in different forms, across many religious and cultural streams of Indian civilization. Brahmanical tradition connected it with Ram and the Ikshvaku

dynasty. Jain tradition established it as the birthplace of many Tirthankaras. Buddhist literature discussed it within the political-cultural world of Kosala and Saketa. Later Vaishnav and Ramanandi traditions developed it as the great pilgrimage centre of devotion to Ram.

Placing all these traditions in one another's stead would be to oversimplify history; but separating them entirely from one another would also be an obstacle to understanding the real cultural complexity of Ayodhya.

The study of Ayodhya therefore teaches us that the cultural memory of a civilization does not reside in archaeological remains alone; it also remains alive in texts, narratives, pilgrimage sites, traditions, journeys, and the collective memory of people. For this very reason, Ayodhya is, in the history of Indian civilization, not merely an ancient city, but an extraordinary centre of continuously reconstructed cultural memory.

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Part 4: The Religious Plurality and Cultural Exchange of Ayodhya

1. The Multi-Layered Religious Character of Ayodhya

Viewing the ancient identity of Ayodhya as confined to a single religious tradition alone diminishes the complexity of its history. Different layers of Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain traditions are visible in the literary and historical material relating to Ayodhya and Saketa. Modern research, too, regards the religious landscape of Ayodhya as multi-layered.

An important methodological point must be understood here. Finding evidence of the presence of a religious tradition in a city does not necessarily prove that that tradition remained equally influential in that city in every period. Religious influences change over time. The study of Ayodhya should therefore be undertaken by holding place, time, tradition, and source together, all four.

2. Ayodhya and Saketa in Buddhist Tradition

Saketa is mentioned in Buddhist literature, and its importance is visible in the political-cultural region of Kosala. Studies connected with Buddhist tradition have connected Saketa with the North Indian urban region of the Buddha's time. Modern research has also attempted to reexamine the Buddhist past of Ayodhya, in

which Pali literature, archaeological reports, and other sources have been used comparatively.

But the same historical caution is necessary here again – the mention of Saketa is not evidence of every historical layer of present-day Ayodhya. Different views have existed in historiography regarding the identification of Saketa and Ayodhya, and the relationship between the two. It will, therefore, be more proper in the book to understand this on the basis of available evidence and scholarly opinion, rather than presenting it as an undisputed fact.

3. Buddhism and Urban Life

The early development of Buddhism was not confined merely to forest hermitages or rural regions. Buddhist literature mentions many large cities, trade routes, guilds, and urban society. The importance of cities such as Saketa can be understood within this broad context.

Contact occurred, in cities, among merchants, travellers, monks, donors, craftsmen, royal officials, and various social groups. The donations and journeys received by religious institutions must also have influenced the economic and social life of cities. However, a definite conclusion regarding the size, number, or economic strength of any particular Buddhist institution in Ayodhya should be

given only when sufficient archaeological or epigraphic evidence is available for it.

4. The Perspective of Chinese Travellers

In the study of ancient and early medieval India, the accounts of Chinese Buddhist travellers are important sources. Travellers such as Faxian, and, later, Xuanzang, described many cities, religious sites, and Buddhist institutions of India. The importance of these travel accounts lies in the fact that they offer the opportunity to view Indian religious geography from the perspective of an outside observer.

But caution is necessary when using travel accounts as well. The traveller's purpose, the time of the journey, his dependence on local information, and the names he used – all these must be understood. It would not, therefore, be proper to treat a traveller's account, alone, as the final proof of any historical conclusion.

5. Ayodhya in Jain Tradition

Ayodhya's connection with Jain tradition is also regarded as extremely important. In Jain tradition, Ayodhya is also addressed by the name Vinita, and traditional Jain literature connects it with many Tirthankaras. In particular, Jain tradition regards Ayodhya as the birthplace of five Tirthankaras – Rishabhanatha, Ajitanatha, Abhinandananatha, Sumatinatha, and Anantanatha.

This tradition accords Ayodhya a special place in Jain religious geography. Modern research has also made the Jain and Buddhist antiquity of Ayodhya a separate subject of study. But a distinction must be maintained here as well – the sanctity of a site in Jain religious tradition and the historical-archaeological evidence of that site are two separate questions. Respecting both, it would not be proper, from a research standpoint, to treat both as the same kind of evidence.

6. Brahmanical Tradition and Ayodhya

In Brahmanical literature, the identity of Ayodhya became connected chiefly with the Ikshvaku dynasty, the Solar dynasty, King Dasharatha, and Lord Ram. The Valmiki Ramayana gave Ayodhya an extraordinary place in Indian cultural memory. Later Puranas, regional traditions of the Ramayana, and religious literature extended this memory still further.

In this process, Ayodhya did not remain merely a royal city. It came to develop as the birthplace of Ram, the land of dharma, the ideal land of rajadharma, a pilgrimage land, and the land of devotion. This cultural development did not occur at the same time, but was constructed by different religious and literary traditions across different periods.

7. Did the Different Traditions Influence One Another?

This question is extremely important. In ancient India, Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical traditions did not always remain in entirely separate social worlds. They developed within the same geographical region. Journeys took place among people, kingdoms changed, trade routes were interconnected, philosophical debates occurred, and traditions of donation and patronage developed. The possibility of cultural contact was, therefore, natural. But a claim such as 'one tradition definitely took this idea from another' requires particular evidence. Visible similarity, and proven direct influence, are not the same thing.

8. Ayodhya: The Transformation from City to Pilgrimage Site

An important process in the history of Ayodhya is its development as a pilgrimage city. In the study of the historian Hans T. Bakker, particular importance is given to Ayodhya's emergence as a sacred pilgrimage centre and its long-term development.

Becoming a pilgrimage site can also influence a city's economy and social structure. Arrangements such as rest-houses, ghats, ritual materials, eateries, accommodation, transport, and local markets develop for pilgrims. In this way, religious faith also becomes connected with the economic and social life of the city. This process has been particularly important in the history of Ayodhya.

9. The Sarayu and Pilgrimage Culture

It is difficult to understand the religious geography of Ayodhya separately from the Sarayu. The river influenced the geographical identity of the city, and the importance of its ghats and bathing developed particularly in later religious traditions. In Indian pilgrimage tradition, a river does not remain merely a source of water. It becomes a centre of sanctity, memory, journey, and religious ritual. The development of the ghats and religious sites of the Sarayu in Ayodhya should be understood within precisely this broad Indian pilgrimage tradition.

10. The Cultural Exchange of Ayodhya

The cultural importance of Ayodhya lies not merely in the fact that various religious traditions were present here. More important still is the fact that the memory of Ayodhya spread to various regions. The Ram narrative appeared, in new forms, in many languages of India – besides Sanskrit, rich traditions of the Ram narrative developed in Awadhi, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, and other languages. Each region expressed the Ram narrative according to its own social and cultural circumstances. This process carried Ayodhya forward from a local city to become part of pan-Indian cultural memory.

11. A Historical Method for Understanding Religious Plurality

The word 'plurality' must also be used with care in the study of Ayodhya. If evidence of several religious traditions is found in a

city in some period, this does not mean that complete equality or harmony always prevailed among all the communities. In history, coexistence, competition, patronage, philosophical disagreement, and changes in royal patronage can all occur together. It would, therefore, not be proper to make the history of Ayodhya either merely a story of conflict, or to describe every period as one of complete religious harmony. The conclusion should go only as far as the evidence indicates.

12. Archaeology and Religious Tradition

Archaeology offers a different path for understanding the history of Ayodhya. Pottery, bricks, architectural remains, coins, sculpture, and other material obtained from excavation can provide information about the settlement and cultural activities of a place. But the identification of an archaeological object and its religious meaning is not always simple. Architecture, context, date, and other independent evidence are necessary to connect the remains of a building with any specific religious institution. This is why, at a sensitive and multi-layered site such as Ayodhya, it is necessary to maintain a clear distinction between evidence and conclusion when interpreting archaeology.

13. The Civilization of Ayodhya: Continuity or Change?

A major question in the history of Ayodhya is whether the same kind of civilization has remained continuous here for thousands of

years, or whether the city's identity has changed over time. From a historical standpoint, the more balanced answer is that the geographical continuity and cultural memory of a place may remain, while the political, economic, and religious character of the city changes from time to time. Different political powers, religious institutions, and social structures may develop at the same place in different periods. The meaning of 'continuity', therefore, is not that Ayodhya was exactly the same in every age. Rather, continuity should be understood at the different levels of memory, place, pilgrimage, literature, and cultural tradition.

Conclusion of Part 4

The ancient history of Ayodhya was formed from the confluence of many religious and cultural streams. Brahmanical tradition connected it with the Ikshvaku dynasty, the Ram narrative, and rajadharma. Sources of Buddhist tradition give a glimpse of the broad political-cultural world of Saketa and Kosala. Jain tradition established Ayodhya as the birthplace of many Tirthankaras. In later periods, devotion to Ram and pilgrimage tradition further broadened the religious identity of Ayodhya.

To understand Ayodhya, therefore, from the standpoint of a single religion or a single period would limit its long history. The real historical importance of Ayodhya lies in its multi-layeredness — archaeology, literature, religion, pilgrimage, city, and cultural

memory. It is only by identifying each of these layers separately and then examining the relationships among them that a more balanced picture of the history of Ayodhya can be constructed. And this will remain the research perspective of this treatise – 'respect for faith, examination of evidence, and the fair presentation of historical disagreements.'

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Part 5: The Ram Narrative, Regional Traditions, and the Pan-Indian Cultural Journey of Ayodhya

1. The Pan-Indian Expansion of the Memory of Ayodhya

The cultural influence of Ayodhya did not remain confined to the bank of the Sarayu alone. With the spread of the Ram narrative, the memory of Ayodhya reached various linguistic and cultural regions of India. Different regions expressed the Ram narrative according to their own language, local religious beliefs, social circumstances, and artistic traditions.

According to a study of Ramayana traditions published by Oxford University Press, the Ramayana traditions of Assam, Bengal, and Odisha in eastern India, while connected with Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana, also incorporate local religious and social influences within themselves. This brings forward an important fact — the expansion of the Ram narrative was not merely a process of translation; it was also a process of cultural re-creation.

2. The Distinction between the Valmiki Ramayana and Regional Ramayanas

In Indian tradition, the Valmiki Ramayana holds a special place as the Adikavya (the first epic). After it, independent forms of the Ram narrative appeared in many languages and regions. The basic structure of the narrative often remained the same in these

– Ram's birth, departure with Vishwamitra, the swayamvara of Sita, exile, the abduction of Sita, the Lanka campaign, the slaying of Ravana, the return to Ayodhya. But local authors extended many episodes according to their own religious and cultural perspective. It would not, therefore, be proper to assume that every episode found in a regional Ramayana is an original episode of the Valmiki Ramayana. It is necessary to keep the original source and later reinterpretation distinct.

3. The Ram Narrative in North India

The most widespread form of the popularity of the Ram narrative in northern India is visible in later Hindi and Awadhi traditions. In particular, Goswami Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas made the Ram narrative extremely widespread in North Indian popular life. The Ramcharitmanas presented Ram not merely as the hero of a royal dynasty, but as the object of devotees' worship and as the centre of popular life. This text, composed in Awadhi, had a profound influence on devotion, morality, the vernacular, music, storytelling, Ramlila, and religious festivals. In this process, the cultural memory of Ayodhya became still more extensive.

4. The Ramayana Traditions of Eastern India

Many regional traditions of the Ramayana developed in Assam, Bengal, and Odisha. According to scholars, these compositions, while taking Valmiki's narrative as their basis, also incorporated

local religious and social ideas. Shakta influence, alongside devotion, is visible in some traditions. This shows that the Ram narrative did not remain fixed in any single religious expression. Wherever it reached, it entered into dialogue with the religious-cultural environment of that place. This is a major characteristic of Indian literature.

5. South India and the Ram Narrative

The tradition of the Ram narrative has been extremely rich in South India. Various forms of the Ram narrative are found in the Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam languages. In South India, the Ram narrative was present not merely in literature, but also in temple architecture, sculpture, dance, music, and religious ritual. Here, too, it is necessary to understand that regional Ram narratives are not verbatim copies of the Sanskrit Ramayana. They express the religious imagination and aesthetic sensibility of local society. In this way, the memory of Ayodhya, reaching South India, took the form of a broad Indian cultural symbol.

6. The Ram Narrative in Western and Central India

Many forms of the Ram narrative also developed in the folk and literary traditions of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Central India. In the broad environment of the Bhakti movement, devotional streams connected with both Ram and Krishna enriched religious literature in the vernacular languages. One result of the spread of the Ram

narrative was that, despite the geographical distance of Ayodhya, an emotional and religious bond continued to be established with it. Pilgrims came to Ayodhya and, returning, carried its memories back to their own regions. In this way, pilgrimage itself became a medium of cultural exchange.

7. The Ram Narrative and Vernacular Languages

Perhaps the greatest cultural power of the Ram narrative lay in its reach into vernacular languages. When the Ram narrative moved out of scholarly Sanskrit literature and reached regional languages, it became more accessible to large populations. In vernacular languages, the Ram narrative reached villages and towns through storytelling, devotional songs, verses, folk songs, drama, and festivals. This process contributed to transforming Ayodhya from a place existing merely in texts into a living cultural memory.

8. Ramlila: The Performative Form of the Narrative

The role of Ramlila in the cultural spread of the Ram narrative has been extraordinary. In Ramlila, literature is not merely read — it is brought to life through acting, music, costume, and visual presentation. According to a modern Oxford study, performative traditions within Indian Ramayana traditions have been an important medium for carrying cultural memory forward across time and place.

Ramlila, religious music, and Ramayana-based performances have also been important in Ayodhya's own cultural tradition. Cultural heritage material of the district administration of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh government, mentions Ramlila, Ram-vivaha singing, jhula, kajri, holi singing, and other religious-cultural traditions. In this way, the Ram narrative did not remain merely a book — it became stage, it became music, it became folk memory.

9. The Musical Tradition of Ayodhya

The cultural life of Ayodhya has also been deeply connected with music. Devotional singing in temples, music at festivals, special singing on the occasion of Ram's wedding, and Ram-narrative-based performances became part of religious life. The official cultural material of the Ayodhya district administration mentions traditions such as Ram-vivaha singing, Ashtayama seva, Ramarchana, jhula, and kajri. This shows that the cultural heritage of Ayodhya is not confined merely to the architectural tradition of temples. It is also an aural tradition.

10. Ayodhya and Folk Art

The true depth of a civilization is visible in its popular life. In the folk art of the Ayodhya region, along with religious beliefs, the memories of daily life are also visible. The district administration's cultural description mentions folk paintings and symbols connected with marriage, birth, death, and other rites. The use of animals

and birds, village deities, and family religious symbols is also visible among these. This makes clear that religious culture does not reside in temples alone. It also remains alive on the walls of homes, in folk songs, in marriage rites, and in rural arts.

11. Ayodhya and India's Cultural Unity

The study of the various regional forms of the Ram narrative is an important medium for understanding Indian cultural unity. One and the same narrative takes different forms in Sanskrit, in Awadhi, in Bengali, in Assamese, in Tamil, in Telugu, in Kannada. The characters and the principal events of the narrative often remain the same, but their meaning and presentation may change. From this, the conclusion follows that Indian cultural unity was not based on uniformity. It was also built from the construction of shared memories within diversity.

12. The Memory of Ayodhya and Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage must have played an important role in connecting Ayodhya with different parts of India. When a pilgrim travels to a sacred city, he does not merely perform religious rites. He observes local traditions, hears narratives, purchases religious literature, meets saints, and carries the memory of his journey back to his own region. In this way, the pilgrim himself becomes a cultural messenger. The development of Ayodhya as a pilgrimage city broadened this cultural contact still further.

13. The Conception of 'Ayodhya' Outside Ayodhya

With the spread of the Ram narrative, Ayodhya did not remain merely a geographical city. Local sites and traditions connected with the Ram narrative developed in many places across India. In one place, a river was connected with the Ram narrative; in another, a forest or mountain, with the memory of Ram's exile; in another, a temple, with Ram, Sita, Lakshman, or Hanuman. This process may be called the expansion of sacred geography. But it would not be proper to treat every local tradition directly as archaeological proof of a historical Ramayana event. It is extremely necessary here to maintain the distinction between religious memory and historical evidence.

14. Ayodhya and the Global Ram Narrative

The cultural expansion of the Ram narrative also occurred beyond the borders of India. Local forms of the Ram narrative developed in many regions of Southeast Asia. Different forms of the Ram narrative are visible in the literary and performative traditions of Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and other regions. Local religion, royal power, art, and folk beliefs influenced these traditions. It would not, therefore, be proper to call the world's Ram narratives merely 'copies of an Indian story'. They are the result of a long dialogue with local cultures.

15. The Ram Narrative: A Shared Story, Different Meanings

The greatest characteristic of the Ram narrative is that different societies gave prominence to different values within it. In one place, Ram is the ideal king; in another, he is God; in another, he is the protector of dharma; in one place, Sita's character acquires particular importance in the narrative; in another, devotion to Hanuman comes to the centre; in another, Ravana's character is presented differently from a local perspective. It is difficult to understand the real cultural journey of the Ram narrative without understanding this diversity.

16. The Construction of Ayodhya's Cultural Identity

The cultural identity of Ayodhya today is the result of processes spanning many centuries. It may be broadly understood in this sequence – ancient literary memory, then the Ram narrative, then expansion into regional languages, then devotional tradition, then pilgrimage, then Ramlila and folk arts, and, ultimately, modern cultural remembrance. This was not a process that occurred in a single day. Each age viewed Ayodhya from its own perspective and added something new to its memory.

17. The Art and Literature of Ayodhya

Literature, painting, music, and the performing arts appear interconnected within the cultural heritage of Ayodhya. According to official cultural descriptions, the artistic tradition of Ayodhya has included temple painting, murals, poetry, music, dance, Ramlila,

and various forms of folk art. This tells us an important characteristic of Indian culture – religion and art were never viewed as entirely separate domains. The religious narrative itself became the inspiration for art, and art carried the religious narrative forward from generation to generation.

18. A Caution Necessary for the Historian

In studying the spread of the Ram narrative, three levels should be kept distinct – first, religious tradition, that is, in what form people hold a narrative with reverence; second, literary history, that is, in what language, by which author, in what period, and in what form the narrative was written; third, historical evidence, that is, what independent epigraphic, archaeological, or other evidence is available for any event or site. These three should not be made substitutes for one another. It is precisely this balance that will help make Eternal Ayodhya a research-based and long-term reference-worthy treatise.

Conclusion of Part 5

The cultural journey of Ayodhya is not merely the story of the spread of the Ram narrative beyond Ayodhya. It is also a key to understanding the cultural structure of India. From Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana to the Ram narratives of regional languages, from temples to folk songs, from Ramlila to pilgrimage – the memory of Ayodhya remained alive through many media.

As the Ram narrative entered various regions, it entered into dialogue with the languages and social-cultural circumstances of those places. For this reason, many branches of the Ram narrative formed in India, but the central memory of Ayodhya remained connected with them. The Oxford Academic study of the Ramayana traditions of eastern India, too, underscores precisely this process of local reinterpretation.

Ayodhya did not remain merely a place of the Ram narrative; with the expansion of the Ram narrative, it became a central symbol of Indian cultural memory. And a distinctive feature of Indian culture was that it carried this shared memory forward through diversity, rather than through uniformity.

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Part 6: Archaeological Evidence, Historical Chronology, and the Civilizational Continuity of Ayodhya

1. The Third Eye of History: Archaeology

Alongside literary texts, the study of archaeology is also necessary for understanding the history of Ayodhya. Literature tells us what the imagination, memory, and religious standing of a city were. Archaeology asks the question from another direction — where did people actually live? What kind of buildings did they construct? What kind of objects did they use? What kind of economic activities took place? And how did the form of the settlement change across different periods?

In the history of Ayodhya, therefore, archaeology and literature should be regarded not as substitutes for one another, but as two different kinds of sources. Archaeological evidence provides important information about human activity and material culture at a place, but from it, every character or event of a literary narrative cannot automatically be proven.

2. The Archaeological Layers of Ayodhya

The most important characteristic of any ancient city is its stratification. The city visible today is not merely the result of the present. Beneath and around it may lie dwellings, roads, pottery,

bricks, religious structures, and other material built in different periods.

Discussion of the material cultures of various periods has occurred in the archaeological study of Ayodhya as well. Some modern studies mention evidence that carries the antiquity of Ayodhya's archaeological settlement back to the early historical period. Excavations conducted in the 1970s under the leadership of B. B. Lal received particular attention in this debate, although questions have also been raised by scholars regarding the detailed publication and interpretation of those excavations. This book will not, therefore, say that any single excavation has finally proven the entire history of Ayodhya.

3. Ayodhya in the Early Historical Period

An important stage in the history of Ayodhya is that in which the process of urbanization in northern India began to appear more clearly. In this period, processes such as the development of cities, the expansion of trade routes, metal and craft production, the use of coins, and the expansion of royal institutions are visible. The study of Ayodhya should be undertaken within precisely this broad historical transformation of northern India. This perspective connects Ayodhya with the larger process of Indian urbanization, rather than confining it to a single narrative or dynasty.

4. Northern Black Polished Ware and Ayodhya

In the archaeology of early historical India, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) is an important artefact tradition. NBPW has been discussed in connection with archaeological material obtained in the Ayodhya region. Such material is useful in the study of the early historical cultural activity of a region.

But an important caution is necessary – finding NBPW at a place does not, in itself, prove that place to be entirely identical with the Ayodhya described in the Ramayana. Pottery may indicate a cultural and chronological context, but the identification of a specific literary event from it cannot be made without separate evidence. This is precisely the necessary distinction between scientific archaeology and literary tradition.

5. Trade Contact and Ayodhya

Ayodhya's geographical location is also helpful in understanding its historical importance. Situated near the Sarayu, this region could have been connected with the broad network of North Indian transport and contact among various regions. Archaeological study has discussed some material obtained from Ayodhya that indicates the possibility of contact with distant regions. For example, in research literature, mention of material such as Roman Rouletted Ware has been viewed in the context of Ayodhya's ancient trade contacts.

But finding an object connected with a foreign or distant region does not necessarily prove that direct trade occurred from there. The object could also have arrived through intermediary trade routes. Archaeological objects, therefore, indicate contact; the definite route of that contact should be determined from separate evidence.

6. Ayodhya and the Broad Indian Trade Network

In ancient India, cities were not isolated economic centres. They were part of a large trade network. Raw material came from villages to cities, artisans made goods, merchants carried them to other regions, and the state received taxes and duties. Pilgrimage, too, created demand for goods and services. It is, therefore, necessary to understand Ayodhya's economic life as well, rather than regarding it merely as a religious city. Religious prestige and economic activity could often reinforce one another.

7. The Changing Political Character of Ayodhya

The political history of Ayodhya, too, did not remain static. Ancient literature connects it with the Ikshvaku and Solar-dynasty royal tradition. By the period of Buddhist literature, the political geography of Kosala appears in a different form, with cities such as Shravasti gaining particular importance.

Earlier historians, too, drew attention to this change. For example, B. H. Baden-Powell wrote, at the end of the nineteenth century, that a distinction should be made between the ancient royal tradition of Ayodhya and the later political centres of the Buddhist period. His article itself presents this subject with caution and as a matter of probability. This brings forward an important historical principle – the religious memory of a city may remain, while its political role may change.

8. The Decline and Revival of a City

The history of ancient cities is not always a history of continuous progress. Sometimes political power changes, sometimes trade routes change, sometimes the importance of a settlement diminishes, and sometimes the same place becomes important again for religious reasons. In the history of Ayodhya as well, processes of rise, transformation, remembrance, and re-establishment must be kept in mind. A simple notion, therefore, such as 'Ayodhya once ended and then suddenly came back into existence,' will not be sufficient. The more appropriate question is how, in different periods, the settlement, political condition, and religious standing of this place kept changing.

9. The Rise of Pilgrimage-Ayodhya

One of the most important historical processes of Ayodhya is its development as a pilgrimage centre. In Hans T. Bakker's study,

particular importance is given to the long-term history of Ayodhya and its development as a pilgrimage centre. Julia Shaw, too, has viewed the sacred landscape of Ayodhya in the context of the interrelationships of ritual memory, history, and archaeology.

With becoming a pilgrimage site, religious institutions, ghats, dwellings, services for pilgrims, and a religious economy may develop in a city. Thus, the history of Ayodhya is not merely the transformation from 'capital' to 'pilgrimage site'. It is also the story of a changing role, from a political city to a religious-cultural city.

10. Archaeology and the Ram Narrative: How to Read Both?

This is the most important research-methodological question of this chapter. The Ramayana presents Ayodhya as a great royal city. Archaeology presents evidence of the actual material culture of various periods. In connecting the two, three questions should be asked – first, is the place described in the literary account the same geographical place? Second, does the period of the archaeological stratum match the estimated period of the literary tradition? Third, does the meaning of the object or structure obtained definitely correspond to what the literary tradition states? Only if the answers to these three questions are available, with evidence, can a strong historical conclusion be drawn. Otherwise, it would be more honest to present the conclusion as possibility, tradition, or interpretation.

11. The Ayodhya Excavations and Disagreement among Scholars

The archaeological debate over Ayodhya has been particularly sensitive. Extensive academic discussion occurred regarding the interpretation of archaeology after 1992, and particularly in the context of the 2003 excavation. Studies published in Cambridge's Antiquity underscored the fact that the relationships among archaeology, religious memory, and politics have remained extremely complex at Ayodhya.

This book will not, therefore, make the claim of any single side, without examination, into final proof. What has archaeological evidence will be presented as fact; what has disputed interpretation will be presented as disputed interpretation; and what is merely religious tradition will be presented as religious tradition. This will be the fair method of research.

12. The Limits of Archaeology

Archaeology is an extremely powerful method of evidence, but it has its own limits. A layer of soil can tell us about a settlement; a brick can tell us about construction technique; pottery can give us indications of period and cultural contact; a sculpture can give information about religious art. But what belief was in a person's mind cannot always be known directly from an archaeological object. Similarly, the religious identity of a building, too, cannot

always be determined merely from its foundation. It is, therefore, necessary to read archaeology together with literature, inscriptions, coins, architecture, and other sources.

13. Literature, Too, Has Its Limits

Just as archaeology has its limits, so, too, does literature. Along with historical memory, epics and religious texts may also contain poetic elaboration, religious ideal, and cultural imagination. Every number, building, road, or event described in literature cannot, therefore, be regarded, in the modern sense, as the result of an archaeological survey. But this does not mean that literature is historically meaningless either. Literature tells us how a society understood the state, religion, family, the ideal king, the city, and sacred geography. The importance of literature, therefore, lies not merely in 'proving an event', but also in understanding the mental and cultural structure of a civilization.

14. Ayodhya: The Continuity of Memory and Place

One of the greatest characteristics of Ayodhya is the continuity of its cultural memory. Political power may change, the size of the city may change, religious institutions may change. But the narrative and the memory of sanctity connected with a place can remain preserved for a long time. In the case of Ayodhya, the Ram narrative gave this memory particular strength. Later devotion to Ram, pilgrimage, and regional literature carried this memory

forward in new forms. It would not, therefore, be sufficient to view the civilizational continuity of Ayodhya merely as the continuity of archaeological bricks. It is also the continuity of memory.

15. Four Ayodhyas: A Consolidated Perspective

Placing the six Parts of this chapter together, four principal historical layers of Ayodhya come to the fore – the first, literary Ayodhya, that is, the Ayodhya described in the Valmiki Ramayana and other literature; the second, historical Ayodhya, that is, Ayodhya in the political-social context of Kosala, Saketa, and early historical northern India; the third, archaeological Ayodhya, that is, the settlement of various periods coming to the fore from excavation and material remains; and the fourth, pilgrimage and cultural Ayodhya, that is, the religious city formed from devotion to Ram, pilgrimage, folk tradition, music, Ramlila, and modern religious memory. It is necessary to understand these four separately, and then to study the proven relationships among them.

16. The Civilizational Importance of Ayodhya

The importance of Ayodhya does not lie merely in its connection with the Ram narrative. Its importance also lies in the fact that many dimensions of Indian civilization can be studied here together – state and rajadharma, city and village, trade and pilgrimage, river and settlement, literature and popular memory,

religion and art, archaeology and history. Ayodhya is, therefore, like a multi-layered laboratory of Indian history, where the historian must read together many different kinds of sources.

17. The Research Perspective of This Chapter

In discussing the antiquity of Ayodhya in Eternal Ayodhya, our purpose has not been to prove any predetermined conclusion. Our purpose has been – to place the evidence before the reader, to state the nature of the source, to acknowledge disagreement, and, where evidence runs out, not to give conjecture the form of evidence. It is precisely this perspective that will give the book the form of a serious research treatise, distinct from an emotional article.

Conclusion of Part 6

The history of Ayodhya is not a history running in a straight line. It is formed of many layers – the literary memory of the Ramayana, the political history of Kosala, early historical urbanization, archaeological remains, Buddhist and Jain traditions, devotion to Ram and pilgrimage culture, and the cultural memory of the modern period – all of these gave shape to the identity of Ayodhya at different times.

Archaeology gives us material evidence, literature gives cultural memory, and religious tradition provides sacred meaning. It would

not be proper to regard these three as the same kind of evidence, but separating the three entirely would also be an obstacle to understanding the complex history of Ayodhya.

The final conclusion of this chapter, therefore, is this – understanding Ayodhya requires placing faith, literature, archaeology, and history, all four, within their own respective spheres of evidence. And this is the greatest characteristic of the history of Ayodhya, that it is not merely the history of a city. It is the history of the memory, change, and continuity of Indian civilization.

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CHAPTER 10

Kosala, Saketa, and Ayodhya: The Changing Picture of Ancient Political History

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Part 1: From Kosala to Saketa – The Early Historical Context of Ayodhya

1. Why Is a Chronology Necessary for Understanding Ayodhya?

The history of Ayodhya is extremely ancient and multi-layered. The first requirement in its study, therefore, is to make its chronology clear.

On the one hand, the Valmiki Ramayana presents Ayodhya as the prosperous city of Kosala and the capital of King Dasharatha. On the other, Buddhist and other early historical sources reveal political and urban centres such as Kosala, Saketa, and Shravasti.

It would not be historically proper to treat all these sources as a direct account of the same time. In this chapter, therefore, three levels will be kept distinct – the literary tradition of the Ramayana, early historical sources, and archaeological evidence. Where

relationships among them are proven or probable, this will be stated; where disagreement exists, it will be made clear.

2. Kosala and Ayodhya in the Ramayana

In the fifth canto of the Bala Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, Kosala is described as a prosperous janapada situated on the bank of the Sarayu, within which is found the description of the celebrated city named Ayodhya.

Ayodhya is portrayed as a magnificent city, furnished with planned roads, highways, markets, buildings, and fort-like structures. In modern historiography, this description has also been studied as a literary portrayal of ancient Indian ideal urban life.

It is important here to distinguish that the Ramayana's description of the city is a literary source. It would not be proper to read it like a modern city map. Even so, this description provides important material for understanding ancient Indian society's concepts of city, royal power, trade, craft, and rajadharma.

3. Kosala: A Janapada and Political Region

'Kosala' was not merely the name of a city. In ancient literature, it appears as a broad janapada or political region.

In the tradition of the Ramayana, the relationship between Ayodhya and Kosala is extremely close. In later Buddhist literature, Kosala appears as a principal Mahajanapada. This

brings before the historian an important question – can the Kosala described in the Ramayana be regarded as exactly the same political unit as the later historical Kosala? It would not be proper to answer this with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Geographical and cultural continuity may be possible, but political boundaries and centres of power can change over time.

4. The Age of the Mahajanapadas

In early historical northern India, by roughly the middle of the first millennium BCE, many large political regions developed, known in Buddhist and Jain traditions as Mahajanapadas. Kosala was among the principal powers of these.

At this time, political organization in northern India was becoming broader, and the importance of cities was also increasing. The relationships among the state, agriculture, the tax system, trade, and military power grew stronger. This broad transformation is also viewed, in Indian history, in the context of the 'second urbanization'. It is necessary to study Ayodhya within precisely this larger historical transformation.

5. Shravasti and the Political Power of Kosala

In the history of Buddhist-period Kosala, Shravasti holds particular importance. Because of this fact, it would not be proper to say merely that Ayodhya was 'the capital of Kosala in every period'.

Historical sources reveal the importance of different cities at different times. For this reason, historians have also attempted to understand the roles of Ayodhya and Saketa separately across different periods.

In Hans T. Bakker's study of Ayodhya, the history of Saketa-Ayodhya from 600 BCE to 1000 CE, and its religious development, is viewed in separate stages. This perspective helps us understand that the history of a city is not determined merely by 'whether it was the capital or not'. A city's religious, commercial, and cultural importance can persist even without being a political capital.

6. The Historical Importance of the Name Saketa

The name Saketa holds particular importance in the history of Ayodhya. Early Buddhist and other literary sources mention Saketa. But the question of how the relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya should be understood has long faced historians. Some scholars have connected the two with the same urban region. On the other hand, older studies also raised questions regarding the identification of the two.

In this treatise, therefore, we shall adopt cautious language – the historical relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya is extremely important, but it is necessary to understand the use of the two names and their geographical-social contexts in different periods

on the basis of separate sources. This is the balanced method of historiography.

7. Names Change; the Memory of a Place May Remain

An important phenomenon in the history of ancient cities is that the same place may be known by different names in different periods. Changes of name may occur because of political power, language, administration, and religious tradition. Conversely, the same name may also be used for different places. It is not, therefore, proper to determine historical identity merely on the basis of similarity of name. In the case of Ayodhya and Saketa as well, it is necessary to read together name, geography, literature, archaeology, and chronology, all of these.

8. Buddhist-Period Northern India and Ayodhya

In the time of the Buddha, many powerful Mahajanapadas existed in northern India. Kosala was among the principal ones. Buddhist literature mentions Kosala's King Prasenajit, and Shravasti is particularly connected with his reign. In this period, an extensive exchange of religious ideas also took place. Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical traditions were developing in different forms. Ayodhya-Saketa should be viewed within precisely this broad religious and political environment.

9. Ayodhya and Religious Dialogue

In the early historical period, cities were not merely centres of political power. They were also becoming centres of religious dialogue. Merchants, travellers, monks, ascetics, scholars, and royal officials travelled among various cities. In such an environment, the spread of religious ideas was natural. In the context of Ayodhya-Saketa, material from Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain traditions helps in the study of precisely this broad cultural environment. But how great the actual population-based influence of any one tradition was in a given period is a separate question, requiring more direct evidence.

10. The Economic Foundation of Ayodhya

The strength of any ancient city was connected with the economy of its surrounding region. Agriculture must have been important in the Kosala region. The Sarayu and the water-region connected with it must have provided favourable circumstances for settlement and agriculture. Grain, livestock, and raw material reached the city from the rural region. In exchange, the city provided crafts, services, commercial markets, and royal administration. It would not, therefore, be proper to regard Ayodhya merely as a city of palaces. Behind it, a broad rural economic region must be envisioned.

11. The Geographical Role of the Sarayu

The Sarayu is an extremely important geographical element of Ayodhya's identity. The relationship between Ayodhya and the Sarayu is also clearly visible in the Ramayana. For cities settled on riverbanks, water, agriculture, transport, and religious activity could be important in various ways. But the claim of what level of river-trade occurred on the Sarayu in any particular ancient period would require specific archaeological and historical evidence. In this book, therefore, the role of the Sarayu will be clearly placed at the level of geographical and cultural importance, while separate evidence will be sought for specific trade claims.

12. The Indication from Archaeology

In the archaeological study of Ayodhya, evidence of the material culture of various periods has been found. In the context of the early historical period, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) is particularly discussed. Such material is regarded as important in the study of urbanization developing in northern India.

But here, once again, the limit of research must be made clear – the presence of NBPW may indicate early historical activity in the Ayodhya region, but it does not, alone, prove every event described in the Ramayana. The evidence of archaeology and the evidence of literary tradition should be placed in separate categories.

13. The History of Ayodhya: Continuity and Change

If the history of Ayodhya is viewed over a long period, an important point comes to the fore – continuity and change proceed together. The memory of a place may remain; religious importance may remain. But political power may change, the size of the city may change, economic routes may change, new religious institutions may develop. For this reason, it is more appropriate to view Ayodhya not as a static picture, but as a continuously changing historical city.

14. The Meeting Point of History and Tradition

The distinctiveness of Ayodhya is that both history and religious memory are extremely powerful here. On the one hand is the Ayodhya of the Ramayana. On the other is the early historical Saketa and Kosala. Then there are archaeological layers. And, later, the developed pilgrimage-Ayodhya. It would be wrong to treat all of these as a picture of the same time. But it would also not be proper to regard them as entirely unconnected with one another. The method of this book, therefore, will be – where continuity appears in the sources, to examine it; where change appears, to analyse it.

15. The Civilizational Importance of Ayodhya

Ayodhya's importance is not merely that it is an ancient religious city. It is also important because, through it, many questions of Indian civilization can be studied – how did states develop? How

were cities formed? How did dialogue occur among religions? How did pilgrimage sites develop? How did rivers influence civilizations? And how did literature preserve the cultural memory of cities? The study of these questions connects Ayodhya with the broad current of Indian history.

Conclusion of Part 1

This first Part of Chapter 10 makes clear that the literary description of the Ramayana alone is not sufficient to understand Ayodhya, and archaeology alone is also not sufficient. We must view Kosala, Saketa, and Ayodhya – all three – within their respective historical contexts.

The Ramayana presents Ayodhya as the great city of Kosala. In early historical sources, the political world of Kosala and Saketa comes to the fore more clearly. Archaeology gives evidence of the material culture of various periods in this region. Modern scholars have attempted to connect these sources, but many questions remain subjects of interpretation and debate even today. Hans Bakker's detailed study also attempts to view the history of Ayodhya by placing it within a long-term chronology.

Our conclusion in this book, therefore, will not be based on any predetermined notion. The tradition of Ayodhya will be respected, but historical conclusions will be presented only on the basis of evidence.

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Part 2: Saketa, Shravasti, and the Political System of Kosala

1. The Power of Kosala in the Mahajanapada Age

Around the sixth century BCE, many large political kingdoms developed in northern India. Among the Mahajanapadas mentioned in Buddhist literature, Kosala was among the principal powers.

Kosala's power did not depend on a single city alone. Its influence was based on a vast territory, an agriculture-based economy, cities, and trade routes. Within this political structure, cities such as Ayodhya, Saketa, and Shravasti must have had different roles.

Study material relating to ancient India from the University of Delhi also presents Ayodhya, Saketa, and Shravasti as important cities of Kosala, and states that, in a later phase, Shravasti became prominent as the political centre. This makes clear that the kingdom was one, but within it there could be several important cities.

2. The Distinction between Capital and Principal City

In historiography, using 'capital' and 'principal city' in the same sense can, at times, create confusion. In a kingdom, one city may be the main centre of royal power, while another city may be extremely important because of trade, religion, or administration.

It is useful to understand Ayodhya and Saketa from precisely this standpoint. The tradition of the Ramayana presents Ayodhya as the royal city of Kosala. In Buddhist-period history, the political importance of Shravasti appears particularly prominent. The importance of Saketa comes to the fore in both political and commercial contexts. It would not, therefore, be proper to apply the situation of any one period to the whole of ancient history.

3. The Rise of Shravasti

Shravasti held particular importance in Buddhist-period Kosala. Many Buddhist traditions connected with King Prasenajit's reign and the life of the Buddha are associated with Shravasti. This city is identified with the modern Saheth-Maheth archaeological site of Uttar Pradesh.

One reason for Shravasti's importance was its political standing, but another reason was also its religious importance. In Buddhist tradition, the Jetavana Vihara holds a particular place. In this way, Shravasti gives us the example that political power and religious prestige could develop together in the same city.

4. The Role of Saketa

The history of Saketa is particularly complex, compared with that of Ayodhya. Saketa is mentioned in ancient sources, and modern

scholars have long discussed its location and its relationship with Ayodhya.

Hans T. Bakker has titled the very first part of his detailed study 'The History of Sāketa/Ayodhyā from 600 BC to AD 1000'. This makes clear that, in modern academic historiography, the relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya is regarded as an important historical question.

Our conclusion here will remain cautious – understanding the relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya requires the examination of period, source, and geographical context, all three.

5. Were Saketa and Ayodhya the Same City?

This question is among the most important questions of this entire subject. Many scholars have connected Saketa with Ayodhya. On the other hand, in some older studies, questions were also raised regarding the relationship between the two names and their independent existence.

It should not, therefore, be written in the book that 'Saketa and Ayodhya were definitely the same city in every period.' Nor should it be written that 'Saketa and Ayodhya had no relationship at all.' Both conclusions would be more definite than the evidence warrants.

The more scientific language would be — different views are found in ancient sources regarding the relationship between Saketa and Ayodhya. Modern historiography has connected the two with the same urban region in many contexts, but a review of different periods and source-traditions is necessary. This accords with the research method of this book.

6. The Political Structure of Kosala

Ancient Mahajanapadas were not like modern nation-states. Their boundaries were not determined by fixed administrative lines like today's districts or states. Various regions, cities, villages, and local powers could exist under the king. Tax collection, military power, agricultural production, and trade routes were the principal foundations of royal authority.

From this standpoint, Kosala can be understood as a developed political power, which expanded its influence over time. Some studies indicate that the various regions and cities of Kosala were, in turn, brought under an increasingly centralized royal authority.

7. The Period of Prasenajit

The name of Prasenajit (Pasenadi) holds particular importance in the history of Kosala. In Buddhist literature, he appears as a powerful ruler contemporary with the Buddha. During his reign, Kosala was among the principal political powers of northern India.

Understanding his reign gives us a glimpse of the monarchy, diplomacy, and religious life of that time. But it is necessary to keep in mind that the condition of the political capital or centre of power at the time of Prasenajit cannot be directly equated with the tradition of the Ayodhya of the Ramayana period. The two are pictures obtained from separate source-traditions.

8. Kosala and Magadha

In the sixth-to-fifth-century-BCE northern India, Kosala and Magadha were two principal powers. Marriage relationships occurred between them, and so did political conflict. The question of control over a prosperous region such as Kashi remained important in the relations between the two kingdoms.

This condition shows that ancient Indian politics was not based merely on religious or dynastic relationships. Land, agriculture, taxes, trade routes, and political prestige were also important causes of contests for power.

9. The Question of Kashi

The Kashi region was extremely important from an economic and political standpoint. The tradition of conflict over Kashi between Kosala and Magadha holds an important place in Buddhist-period political history. If a kingdom possessed fertile land and prosperous commercial centres, its economic power increased. The

expansion of Kosala, therefore, was not merely a political desire to increase territory. Economic and strategic interests must also have lain behind it. In this context, it is also necessary to view Ayodhya and Saketa within the broad political-economic system of Kosala.

10. The Importance of Trade Routes

A great foundation of the power of ancient cities was their trade contacts. The cities of Kosala were connected by routes linking various regions. The importance of Saketa can, for this reason, be understood not merely politically, but also economically. Merchants carried agricultural produce, textiles, metal, jewellery, pottery, and other goods from one region to another. Cities provided markets for these trade activities. For this reason, even when a city's political prestige diminished, its economic importance could remain for a long time.

11. The City and the Rural Economy

The real economic power of an ancient kingdom lay in its rural regions. Farmers produced on the land, the state received taxes, merchants carried the produce to cities, and artisans transformed it into useful goods. These same goods then went to other regions. In this way, village, city, trade route, and other cities together formed an economic cycle. In understanding the historical

role of Ayodhya and Saketa, this rural-urban relationship should not be forgotten.

12. Religious City and Political City

In ancient India, the importance of a city was not determined merely by its being a political capital. Some cities became important for religious reasons, some because of trade, some because of education, some because of royal power, and, in some cities, all these roles converged.

This is also a distinctive feature of Ayodhya – that its memory shows all three forms, capital, religious centre, and cultural city. Its later development as a pilgrimage centre makes this long-term transformation still clearer. Bakker's study, too, views the process from Ayodhya's political history to its gradual religious-cultural development in separate chapters.

13. The Transformation of Kosala's Power

Kosala did not always remain an independent and equally powerful kingdom. As Magadha's influence grew, the political balance of northern India kept changing. Ultimately, Kosala could not withstand the growing power of Magadha as an independent political power.

This transformation was also important for the political role of cities such as Ayodhya, Saketa, and Shravasti. When a kingdom's

independence ends, it is not necessary that the importance of its cities also end. They may remain important as administrative, commercial, or religious centres under a new empire.

14. After the Mauryan Empire

After the Mauryan empire, political circumstances again changed in northern India. The Shungas, the Kushanas, local powers, and various later dynasties became influential in different regions. In this period, inscriptions, coins, archaeological remains, and literary sources hold particular importance for understanding the historical role of the Ayodhya region. It is precisely from this point that understanding religious and cultural reconstruction, alongside political power, in the history of Ayodhya becomes even more necessary.

15. Why Did the Memory of Ayodhya Remain?

Political power kept changing, but Ayodhya's cultural name and memory did not end. A major reason for this was the broad tradition of the Ram narrative. In later centuries, the various forms of the Ram narrative gave Ayodhya a permanent place in the cultural geography of India. In this way, the role of a city may diminish in political history, but its importance may also increase in religious-cultural history. Ayodhya is an important example of this.

16. The Most Important Caution for the Historian

The greatest mistake in the history of Ayodhya would be to apply the situation of one period to another period. If Shravasti was a political centre in the sixth century BCE, this does not mean that the importance of Ayodhya in the Ramayana tradition ended. And if Ayodhya is a royal city in the Ramayana, this does not automatically prove that it remained the same political capital in every subsequent historical period. Similarly, if the name Saketa is found in a certain period, its relationship with modern Ayodhya cannot be finally determined on the basis of the name alone. Chronology is the key to this entire study.

Conclusion of Part 2

Understanding the political history of Kosala makes clear that it would not be proper to give Ayodhya, Saketa, and Shravasti an identical political role at the same time. The Ayodhya of the Ramayana comes to the fore as a great royal city. In Buddhist-period Kosala, the political importance of Shravasti appears extremely prominent. Saketa comes to the fore as an important urban centre, and scholars have discussed its relationship with Ayodhya in detail.

Despite the change of political power in later periods, the cultural memory of Ayodhya remained, and its religious importance developed still further, going forward. The structure of Bakker's

study, too, places the history of Saketa/Ayodhya, from 600 BCE to the medieval period, and its gradual religious development, in separate stages.

The fundamental principle of this chapter will therefore be – 'the history of Ayodhya should be understood not as the fixed story of a single city, but as a long-term process of changing political powers, cities, trade routes, and cultural memories.'

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5. Hans Bakker's studies on the religious and cultural development of Ayodhya.

Part 3: The Sovereignty, Administration, and Socio-Economic Life of Kosala

1. The Concept of the Ancient State

The states of ancient India were extremely different from modern nation-states. Today, a state has clear boundaries, a written constitution, fixed administrative departments, and a modern bureaucracy. The system of the ancient Mahajanapadas was not like this.

The foundation of the king's power depended chiefly on land, agricultural production, tax collection, the army, political relationships, and religious legitimacy. Kosala, too, was part of precisely this broad political system. For this reason, it is not sufficient, in understanding the history of Ayodhya, merely to know the names of kings. We must also see how the state and society were interconnected at that time.

2. The Role of the King

In the tradition of the Ramayana, the king is regarded not merely as a ruler, but as the protector of dharma and of the subjects. In the episodes of Dasharatha and Ram, the concepts of rajadharma, the keeping of one's word, justice, and the welfare of subjects are prominent. Buddhist literature, too, presents a portrayal of the political power of the kings of Kosala.

But it would not be proper to regard literary ideal and actual administration as one and the same thing. The ideal rajadharma described in the Ramayana tells us what kind of conduct was expected of a king in Indian political thought. For information on actual administration, we must take the help of inscriptions, archaeological evidence, and other contemporary sources.

3. The Concept of Rajadharma

Rajadharma remained an extremely important concept in Indian political tradition. The king was expected to protect his subjects, establish justice, maintain order, protect religious and social institutions, and ensure the prosperity of the kingdom.

Ram's character became, in later Indian tradition, the most influential symbol of precisely this ideal rajadharma. The concept of 'Ram Rajya' is not, therefore, merely a historical report of ancient governance. It developed, in later Indian political and moral imagination, as a symbol of ideal governance.

4. The Actual Form of Administration

The complete structure of ancient Kosala's administration is not available to us in the manner of a modern government. From various literary sources, we obtain information relating to the king, ministers, priests, soldiers, and other officials. But it would not be

proper to imagine a fixed administrative structure resembling a modern ministry.

There were probably various roles for advisers, officials, priests, and military leadership around the king. The actual form of these institutions could change according to time and region. Where direct evidence does not exist, therefore, we should not present conjecture as fact.

5. The Council of Ministers and Advisers

The Ramayana mentions ministers and advisers alongside the king. The king was not the sole decision-maker in the governance of the kingdom. He needed various experts and advisers on political, military, economic, and religious matters.

This arrangement points us toward an important principle of ancient Indian sovereignty – the king could be supreme, but governance was conducted with collective counsel and the cooperation of various institutions. However, it is necessary to determine, separately on the basis of sources, what the actual powers of ministers were in different periods.

6. The Priest and Royal Authority

In ancient Indian political systems, the relationship between religious prestige and royal power was important. The king's yajnas, religious rites, and the role of priests are mentioned in

Vedic and epic traditions. The presence of sages such as Vashishtha in the Ramayana is part of precisely this cultural system.

But it is necessary here, too, to make clear that it would not be proper to regard the role of the priest described in religious texts as the actual administrative institution of every historical period. This is clearer evidence at the level of literary and religious tradition.

7. Taxation and the Revenue System

Economic resources are necessary for running any large kingdom. The principal foundation of ancient kingdoms' income must have been agricultural production and the taxes connected with it. Beyond this, revenue must also have been received from trade, livestock, crafts, and other economic activities.

But sufficient direct evidence is not available to determine the exact tax rate, the complete tax-collection system, or the name of each tax in any particular period of Kosala. In this book, therefore, we shall present as definite fact only those matters for which sources are available.

8. Agriculture: The Economic Foundation of the State

Agriculture was the backbone of the ancient Indian economy. The vast territory of Ayodhya and Kosala must have been important for

agricultural production. Grain obtained from agriculture provided food to cities, revenue to the state, and a foundation of life to society. Alongside agriculture, animal husbandry, too, was an important part of the rural economy. Through this, city and village remained dependent on one another. Without understanding this relationship, it is not possible to fully understand the economic history of ancient Ayodhya.

9. The Relationship of Village and City

A large rural region lay behind ancient cities. The city obtained grain, milk, livestock, wood, raw material, and labour from villages. The rural region obtained markets, finished goods, crafts, and administrative services from the city. It would, therefore, be an incomplete perspective to regard Ayodhya merely as a city of palaces and markets. Ayodhya's actual economic power was also connected with the rural society around it.

10. The Role of Craftsmen

In ancient urban economies, the importance of craftsmen was extremely great. Activities such as metalwork, pottery, textiles, wood, jewellery, chariots, and construction could be part of the city's economic system. Literary mention of various occupations and craftsman-groups is found in the Ramayana's description of the city. But independent archaeological evidence would be required to establish definitely any particular craft in Ayodhya at a

particular period. It is, therefore, necessary from a research standpoint to keep literary mention and archaeological evidence distinct.

11. The Merchant Class

Merchants were the economic lifeline of ancient cities. They brought goods from various regions and exchanged them in the markets of cities. Because of trade, cities did not exchange only economic goods. Along with them, languages, ideas, religious beliefs, art, and cultural traditions also reached from one region to another. From this standpoint, Ayodhya's commercial importance could also be connected with its cultural influence.

12. The Military System

An army was necessary for the security of the kingdom. In the context of Ayodhya, the Ramayana describes military strength, chariots, elephants, horses, and soldiers. This literary portrayal helps us understand the ancient Indian concept of military power.

But questions such as what the actual number of Kosala's army was in any particular period, what kinds of soldiers there were, and what their organizational structure was like, require independent historical evidence for their answers. The literary number or description should not, therefore, be regarded, without examination, as an actual military figure.

13. Forts and City Security

The security of ancient cities was an important part of political power. Ayodhya is described in the Ramayana as a strong and secure city. Such a description indicates that, in ancient Indian literature, the ideal capital was imagined together with security and a well-organized urban structure.

If a wall, moat, or fortification of a particular period is found through archaeology, its dating and function must be established separately. Thus, a literary description of fortification does not automatically become archaeological proof of a fort. This distinction must be maintained continuously in the research method of this treatise.

14. Ordinary Social Life

History is not merely the history of kings. The actual life of a city is formed by the ordinary people living there. Farmers, merchants, artisans, soldiers, religious practitioners, servants, and other social groups together made the city and the kingdom vibrant. The literary world of the Ramayana, too, reveals the presence of many social classes. But to understand the actual life of ordinary people, archaeology and other sources of social history hold particular importance.

15. The Role of Women

The role of women is extremely important in the cultural memory of Ayodhya. Characters such as Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra bring the condition of the women of the royal family into literary form. Sita's character became one of the most influential feminine images of Indian civilization.

However, it would not be proper to draw a conclusion regarding the actual condition of every woman of contemporary society from literary characters. A comparative study of dharmashastra, literature, inscriptions, and other sources is necessary for the study of women's social, economic, and legal status.

16. Religion and Social Order

Various religious traditions must have existed in the society of Kosala. Alongside Vedic-Brahmanical tradition, Buddhist and Jain currents of thought were also active in northern India. The presence of various religious groups in cities made the exchange of ideas possible. This religious plurality, going forward, became an important feature of the cultural history of Ayodhya.

17. The Relationship between Royal Power and Religion

In ancient India, it is difficult to regard religion and politics, in the modern sense, as entirely separate institutions. The king participated in religious rites. Religious prestige could provide legitimacy to royal power. The king could provide patronage to

religious institutions. On the other hand, religious institutions could also strengthen the king's standing in society. This relationship appears particularly in the Ayodhya of the Ramayana. But the actual form of this relationship must have changed in different historical periods.

18. From Kosala to Ayodhya: A Changing Political Geography

An important fact emerges from the study so far — it is not sufficient to view Ayodhya merely as a static capital. The political geography of Kosala changed over time. The importance of Shravasti increased. Saketa is mentioned. The power of Magadha grew. Mauryan and post-Mauryan political structures arrived. Then various regional powers developed. Amid all these changes, the cultural memory of Ayodhya remained, in different forms.

19. From Political Power to Cultural Power

The power of a city cannot be measured merely by its throne. At one time, Ayodhya was the capital of royal ideal. In a later period, its religious prestige became more prominent. Then devotion to Ram broadened its cultural power still further. Thus, the history of Ayodhya teaches us that political power may end, but cultural power can remain alive for a long time. This cultural longevity is among the greatest historical features of Ayodhya.

Conclusion of Part 3

Understanding the political system of Kosala reveals the history of Ayodhya in a broader form. It was not merely the history of kings and wars. Behind it were farmers, craftsmen, merchants, soldiers, religious groups, villages, cities, and vast cultural traditions.

The Ramayana gives us knowledge of ideal rajadharma and Ayodhya's cultural urban form. Buddhist literature brings forward the political power of Kosala and the importance of Shravasti. Archaeology gives us evidence of material life. Reading all these sources together, Ayodhya comes to the fore not merely as a royal city, but as a confluence of political, economic, social, and cultural life.

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Part 4: Kosala and Magadha – Contests for Power, Kashi, and the Changing Political Geography of Northern India

1. Two Great Powers of Northern India

In the sixth-to-fifth century BCE, the political landscape of northern India was changing rapidly. There was competition among many Mahajanapadas, but, over time, some kingdoms emerged as comparatively more powerful. Among these, Kosala and Magadha were particularly important.

Kosala's influence extended over a large part of present-day Uttar Pradesh and its connected regions, while Magadha's power was rapidly increasing in eastern India. The relationship between the two was not confined to war alone. Marriage relationships, political settlements, and economic interests also influenced their relations. This is why the history of Kosala and Magadha is not merely the story of the conflict of two kingdoms, but the story of the construction of a new political era in northern India.

2. The Kosala of Prasenajit

King Prasenajit (Pasenadi) of Kosala is particularly mentioned in Buddhist literature. He is presented as a ruler contemporary with the Buddha, and Shravasti is particularly connected with his reign. In his time, Kosala was an influential political power.

Understanding King Prasenajit's reign gives us a glimpse of the monarchy, diplomacy, and religious life of that time. But it is necessary to keep in mind that the condition of the political capital or centre of power at the time of Prasenajit cannot be directly equated with the tradition of the Ayodhya of the Ramayana period. The two are pictures obtained from separate source-traditions.

3. The Relationship between Kosala and Magadha

A particular feature appears in the relations between Kosala and Magadha – political competition and family relationships proceeded together. According to traditional Buddhist sources, Prasenajit was connected with the family of Bimbisara, the king of Magadha, through marriage relationships. Such marriages were not merely family relationships. In ancient politics, marriage often also became a means of diplomatic settlement. But marriage relationships did not always guarantee lasting peace. In subsequent events, tension between Kosala and Magadha again increased.

4. The Political Importance of Kashi

The question of Kashi was extremely important in the relations between Kosala and Magadha. Kashi was a prosperous and esteemed region of ancient northern India. Its agricultural wealth, urban development, and commercial standing made it attractive from a political standpoint. Buddhist literature provides the

background of the relations of Kosala and Magadha with respect to Kashi. This shows that ancient political conflict did not occur merely for dynastic prestige. Economic and political interests such as land, agriculture, revenue, trade, and strategic position also lay behind it.

5. Marriage and Kashi

According to Buddhist tradition, Prasenajit married his sister Kosaladevi to Bimbisara, the king of Magadha. Along with this marriage relationship, the question of rights or revenue connected with Kashi is also said to be involved. This event is important for understanding ancient Indian diplomacy.

But the nature of the sources should be kept in mind here as well. This account comes chiefly from literary traditions; it would not, therefore, be proper to read it in the manner of a modern revenue system. Even so, it makes clear that marriage, regional right, and economic interest could be interconnected in ancient politics.

6. Bimbisara and Magadha

During the reign of King Bimbisara of Magadha, the power of Magadha grew rapidly. Rajagriha was Magadha's important political centre. Magadha's geographical position, agricultural resources, the proximity of iron resources, and contact with the Ganga region

played a role in its development — although the role of all these factors, and their comparative importance, has been a subject of discussion among historians. The growing power of Magadha created new political pressure for other powers of northern India, including Kosala.

7. The Time of Ajatashatru

After Bimbisara, Ajatashatru became the principal ruler of Magadha. Buddhist traditions mention his reign and his wars. In Ajatashatru's time, the power of Magadha became still stronger. His conflict was not confined to Kosala alone; his relations were also conflict-ridden with other powers, including the Vajji Sangha. This makes clear that, around the fifth century BCE, the balance of power in northern India was changing rapidly.

8. Prasenajit and Ajatashatru

An account of the relations between Prasenajit and Ajatashatru is found in Buddhist literature. A tradition of conflict, and later of settlement, between the two powers also comes to the fore. The historical importance of these events lies in the fact that they show that relations between Kosala and Magadha were not stable. Sometimes war, sometimes marriage, sometimes political settlement — through all these means, the two powers remained connected with one another.

9. The Internal Condition of Kosala

Alongside external conflicts, the power of a kingdom also depends on its internal political stability. Dynastic succession, local powers, economic resources, and administrative control – all these influenced the strength of the kingdom. After Prasenajit, the political condition of Kosala weakened, and the power of Magadha became comparatively more influential. This change cannot be understood merely through the personal qualities of kings. Broader political changes also lay behind it.

10. The Growing Dominance of Magadha

Magadha gradually increased its influence in northern India. The expansion of Magadha's power continued during the time of Ajatashatru and his successors. Going forward, the rise of the Nanda and then the Mauryan power gave this process still broader form. This transformation meant that the political geography of northern India was now moving, from small and large Mahajanapadas, in the direction of a great empire. This was an important turning point in Indian history.

11. Kosala's Absorption into Magadha

According to different traditions of ancient sources, Kosala ultimately came under the growing power of Magadha. All the details are not equally clear in the sources regarding the detailed

circumstances and chronology of this event. It will, therefore, be more proper in the book to view it not as a single event presented with excessive certainty, but as a broad political process. The main point is that the political power of independent Kosala gradually weakened before the dominance of Magadha.

12. What Effect Did This Have on Ayodhya?

An important historical question arises here – when the independent political power of Kosala weakened, what happened to Ayodhya? The answer is not that Ayodhya's importance immediately ended. The change of political power is not the end of a city's existence. Cities can remain important, going forward, because of their economic, social, and religious roles. The later history of Ayodhya-Saketa gives us the opportunity to understand precisely this continuity and change.

13. Shravasti, Saketa, and Ayodhya

Three names come to the fore particularly in the political history of Kosala – Shravasti, Saketa, and Ayodhya. The role of all three kept changing in different periods. Shravasti emerges as the principal political and religious centre of Buddhist-period Kosala. Saketa is mentioned in early historical sources. The cultural memory of Ayodhya remains continuously preserved in the Ramayana and in later religious traditions. Binding all three into a

single political role would, therefore, oversimplify the complexity of history.

14. The Life of a City Beyond Political Capital

The importance of a city does not depend on its being a capital. Commercial cities can prosper even without being capitals. Religious cities can become renowned far and wide even while remaining outside political power. The prestige of pilgrimage cities is, at times, even more lasting than that of political capitals. This same feature is visible in the long-term history of Ayodhya. Its cultural memory has remained far longer than the rise and fall of political power.

15. Trade and Political Change

When political power changes, trade routes, too, can be affected. With the rise of a new capital, some routes become more important, and the importance of old routes may diminish. But commercial cities do not disappear entirely. The merchant class establishes relationships with new political centres according to its economic interests. It is, therefore, necessary to keep the trade network in mind when understanding the transition of power from Kosala to Magadha.

16. The Geographical Position of Ayodhya

Ayodhya's geographical position, on the bank of the Sarayu, is important in understanding its long history. Its connection with the river, agricultural land, and North Indian geography must have made it an important settlement region. However, to determine the definite direction and volume of its trade routes in any particular period, separate examination of archaeological and literary evidence is necessary. Geography provides possibilities; history examines those possibilities on the basis of evidence.

17. Political Change and Religious Continuity

Kosala's political power weakened. Magadha's dominance grew. Later, the Mauryan empire arrived. Even after this, the cultural memory of Ayodhya remained. This is an important principle of history – political boundaries can change, but cultural memories can remain alive for a much longer time. Ayodhya is a major example of this principle in Indian history.

18. Ayodhya and the Transition toward the Mauryan Age

The expansion of Magadha ultimately gave birth to the political environment in which the rise of the Mauryan empire became possible. In the time of Chandragupta Maurya and his successors, northern India came under a vast empire. Now, the history of Ayodhya and Kosala began to be viewed not as the history of an independent Mahajanapada, but as the history of a region situated

within a great empire. This transformation is extremely important for understanding the next historical stage.

19. The Limits of the Sources

Our principal sources in the history of the Kosala-Magadha conflict are literary. Buddhist texts also present the religious and moral perspective of events. Later texts, too, may preserve the memory of earlier events. Historians must, therefore, keep the period of composition, purpose, and tradition of the sources in mind. A mention of an event in a text is important, but that mention does not, by itself, become a direct historical report in the modern sense.

20. A Balanced Research Perspective

The purpose of this chapter is not to prove either Kosala or Magadha 'superior'. Our purpose is to understand how the competition of small and large political centres led to the construction of larger kingdoms in northern India, and how, in this process, the role of ancient cities such as Ayodhya kept changing. Ayodhya's glory did not lie in political power alone. Its greatest strength also lay in its long-term cultural memory.

Conclusion of Part 4

The conflict of Kosala and Magadha can be viewed as the background of a great transformation in Indian history. In the time

of Prasenajit, Kosala was an influential power. Marriage, diplomacy, and conflict are all visible in its relations with Magadha. Prosperous regions such as Kashi became important causes of political competition.

In the time of Ajatashatru, the power of Magadha increased further, and, going forward, the process of the construction of a great empire strengthened. This political change cannot be interpreted as the end of Ayodhya. On the contrary, Ayodhya's cultural identity remained a long-term tradition, separate from political power.

Therefore – 'the political sun of Kosala set, but the cultural memory of Ayodhya did not end.' It is precisely this distinction that inspires us to view the history of Ayodhya not merely as a list of dynasties, but as the history of civilization and cultural continuity.

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Part 5: Ayodhya from the Mauryan Empire to the Post-Mauryan Period

1. From Mahajanapadas toward Empire

After the long political conflicts between Kosala and Magadha, the politics of northern India enters a new stage. The expansion of Magadha's power gave momentum to the process of incorporating many small and large kingdoms into a broad political system. It was against precisely this background that the Mauryan empire arose.

In the time of Chandragupta Maurya, a vast empire was constructed, which joined a large part of northern India within a single political structure. Now, the history of Ayodhya and Kosala was no longer merely the story of an independent Mahajanapada.

2. Chandragupta Maurya and the New Political System

Under Chandragupta Maurya's rule, Magadha-centred power expanded. Mauryan administration is regarded as an example of a broader and more centralized political system, compared with earlier Mahajanapadas. The Arthashastra, the accounts of Greek writers, and later epigraphic evidence are principal sources for understanding Mauryan rule.

But the nature of all these sources differs. It would not, therefore, be proper to draw conclusions about the entire administrative

system of the Mauryan empire from any single source. The Ayodhya region, too, must have become part of this broad imperial political system, but a detailed account of every unit of its local administration is not available to us.

3. Ayodhya and Mauryan Administration

The administration of the Mauryan empire functioned at different levels across a vast territory. Provinces, local administration, the revenue system, and the various roles of officials are mentioned in Mauryan-period sources. But which official was appointed in Ayodhya, what his jurisdiction was, and what the complete structure of local administration was like – direct evidence for these questions is limited.

It would, therefore, be more proper here to say that the Ayodhya region came within the broad sphere of Mauryan political dominance, but the complete structure of its local administration is still a subject of research.

4. The Age of Ashoka

The place of Emperor Ashoka in Mauryan history is special. After the Kalinga war, particular importance was given, in his reign, to policies relating to Buddhism and Dhamma. Ashoka's rock edicts are among the most important epigraphic sources of Indian history. From these edicts, we obtain important information about

his reign, moral policies, administrative officials, and his approach toward various religious communities.

But an important caution is necessary in relation to Ayodhya – not all of Ashoka's principal edicts relate directly to Ayodhya. It would not, therefore, be proper to claim any particular religious event in Ayodhya merely on the basis of Ashoka's broad Dhamma-propagation.

5. Did Ashoka Establish Buddhism in Ayodhya?

This question often arises in the history of Ayodhya. That Buddhism received royal patronage during Ashoka's reign is widely accepted from epigraphic and literary sources. But this does not automatically prove that Ashoka established any particular vihara, stupa, or institution in Ayodhya. Local archaeological or epigraphic evidence would be required for such a claim.

In this treatise, therefore, Ashoka's patronage of Buddhism is a proven broad historical fact, while the claim of the establishment by Ashoka of any particular religious structure in Ayodhya requires separate evidence. This distinction is extremely important for the reliability of the research.

6. The Mauryan-Period Religious Environment

India's religious life in the Mauryan age was extremely diverse. Brahmanical traditions already existed. Buddhism expanded. Jain

tradition, too, remained active. Ashoka's edicts contain the idea of respect and tolerance toward various religious communities. Within this broad environment, the religious life of ancient cities such as Ayodhya, too, must have been multidimensional. But the determination of which religious group was, numerically, how influential in Ayodhya at a particular time should not be made without direct evidence.

7. Ayodhya and Buddhist Tradition

The relationship of Ayodhya-Saketa is also visible in Buddhist literature. Religious episodes connected with this region are found in later Buddhist texts and traditions. This indicates that Ayodhya-Saketa was not entirely separate from the broad Buddhist cultural world. But this does not mean that Ayodhya was, at that time, merely a Buddhist city. A comparative study of Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain sources, all three, is necessary to understand the religious identity of Ayodhya.

8. The Decline of the Mauryan Empire

After Ashoka, the central power of the Mauryan empire gradually weakened. Historians hold different views on the causes of the decline of the Mauryan empire. Some scholars give importance to administrative and political weaknesses. Some discuss economic pressures. Some regard problems relating to succession and the difficulty of controlling a vast empire as principal factors. It would

not, therefore, be proper to accept any single cause of the Mauryan decline as definite.

9. Post-Mauryan India

After the weakening of Mauryan power, various regional and dynastic powers arose in northern India. The Shungas, the Kanvas, the Kushanas, and other local powers established influence in different regions. In this period, the political map again became multi-centred. Ayodhya, too, continued to move forward within this changing political environment. It is from this point that understanding the role of local dynasties and regional political powers in the history of Ayodhya becomes important.

10. The Shunga Period and Ayodhya

In post-Mauryan northern India, the Shunga dynasty arose. The Shungas' political centre was chiefly connected with the middle Ganga region and Central India. Among the most important epigraphic evidences relating to Ayodhya is the Ayodhya inscription of Dhanadeva, which is generally regarded as important in the post-Shunga/Shunga-period political context.

The interpretation of this inscription is extremely useful for historians, for it indicates a relationship between a local royal power and Brahmanical tradition in Ayodhya. However, discussion

is found among scholars regarding the date of the inscription and the dynastic questions connected with it.

11. The Importance of the Dhanadeva Inscription

The importance of the Dhanadeva inscription is particularly great because it provides epigraphic evidence, rather than literary narrative. This Sanskrit inscription, in the Brahmi script, found at the Ranopali monastery in Ayodhya, mentions Kaushikiputra Dhanadeva, the sixth-generation descendant of the general Pushyamitra (Shunga), who calls himself 'Kosaladhipa' (lord of Kosala) and states that Pushyamitra performed two Ashvamedha yajnas. On the basis of palaeographic evidence, it is dated to the first century BCE/CE.

Here, an important principle comes to the fore from the historian's standpoint – when both literary tradition and an inscription are available, both should be read as independent sources. An inscription does not automatically prove the narrative of literature, but it can provide independent information about that same historical region. On the basis of coins of local 'Deva' rulers, such as Muladeva, Vayudeva, Vishakhadeva, Phalgudeva, and Dhanadeva, in the Saketa/Ayodhya region, scholars have also identified a local Deva dynasty, which was active in this region either under Shunga authority, or as its successor.

12. Pushyamitra and the Question of the Ashvamedha

In the context of the history of Ayodhya, discussion also occurs of the Shunga ruler Pushyamitra and the Ashvamedha yajna. Some literary sources (such as the Malavikagnimitram and the Mahabhashya) mention Pushyamitra's Ashvamedha yajnas. The mention of the tradition relating to the Ashvamedha in the Dhanadeva inscription, too, has been a subject of scholarly study.

But caution is necessary here as well. It would be incomplete to regard the Ashvamedha merely as a religious ritual; in ancient political culture, it was also connected with royal sovereignty and prestige. The Dhanadeva inscription itself does not say that the Ashvamedha was performed in Ayodhya itself; the inscription chiefly mentions a memorial/temple built by his descendant in Pushyamitra's memory. A conclusion such as 'Pushyamitra performed the Ashvamedha in Ayodhya itself,' therefore, demands additional caution.

13. A Revival of Brahmanical Tradition?

In the context of the post-Mauryan period, it is sometimes said that a 'revival' of Brahmanical religion occurred. This statement is a subject of discussion among historians. Some scholars give importance to the growing prestige of Vedic rites and Brahmanical royal traditions in the Shunga period. On the other hand, modern research also cautions that it would be an oversimplification to call this simply 'the decline of Buddhism and the return of Brahmanical

religion'. The actual situation was probably more complex. Different religious traditions remained present together in many regions.

14. Religious Plurality in Ayodhya

One of the most important features of the history of Ayodhya is its religious plurality. On the one hand was the memory of Ram and the Ikshvaku tradition. On the other were Buddhist traditions. A relationship of Jain tradition, too, with Ayodhya has been mentioned. In later centuries, Vaishnav and Ram-devotional traditions further strengthened the religious identity of this city. To declare Ayodhya, in any one period, a city of a single religious tradition alone would, therefore, diminish the multi-layered nature of history.

15. Trade and Cultural Contact

The expansion of trade contacts continued in northern India in the post-Mauryan period. Religious ideas and cultural elements also travelled with merchants and travellers. Cities such as Ayodhya-Saketa must have continued to be influenced by these contacts. Travellers coming to cities did not merely exchange goods. Narratives, languages, religious ideas, artistic forms, and social traditions also travelled with them. In this way, Ayodhya's cultural identity cannot be separated from its geographical contacts.

16. Coins and Economic History

The study of coins is also important in understanding the economic history of ancient Ayodhya. Coins connected with local rulers and various dynasties help in the study of political power, economic activity, and trade relationships. However, obtaining a coin does not, by itself, determine the entire political territory of its issuer. Study of the coin's date, metal, symbols, findspot, and other archaeological context is all necessary. Numismatics is, therefore, an important auxiliary source in the economic history of Ayodhya.

17. Archaeology and Urban Development

In the archaeological study of Ayodhya, the cultural layers of various periods are important. Pottery, building remains, coins, sculpture, bricks, and other antiquities can help in understanding the story of the city's development. But the finding of an antiquity does not, by itself, prove its literary context. An archaeological layer is material history, and the Ramayana's description is literary-cultural history; additional evidence is necessary to establish the relationship between the two.

18. The Historical Continuity of Ayodhya

The Mauryan empire came and went. Shunga power came. Later, other political powers arrived. But the name and cultural importance of Ayodhya remained, in different forms. This continuity was not merely political. It was also geographical, cultural,

religious, and literary continuity. This is why the history of Ayodhya holds a special place in the long-term history of Indian civilization.

19. An Important Historical Caution

It would not be proper to regard every ancient narrative relating to Ayodhya as a direct historical event. Similarly, it would also not be scientifically proper to regard every archaeological discovery as proof of a religious narrative. In this book, it is necessary to present both respectfully, but independently. Tradition gives us memory, archaeology gives us material evidence, inscriptions give us contemporary or near-contemporary written evidence, and the historian undertakes a comparative examination of all these. This is the fundamental method of research.

Conclusion of Part 5

With the rise of the Mauryan empire, the history of Kosala and Ayodhya enters a great imperial political structure. During Ashoka's time, Buddhism received broad royal patronage, but independent local evidence is necessary to connect any specific Buddhist construction in Ayodhya merely with Ashoka's name.

After the decline of the Mauryan empire, regional powers again arose in northern India. The Dhanadeva inscription relating to Ayodhya holds particular importance in the study of this post-

Mauryan/Shunga-period political and religious history – it is the earliest surviving epigraphic mention of the name of Pushyamitra Shunga, and also confirms the existence of a local Deva dynasty.

The most important feature of this period is that Ayodhya cannot be confined to any single religious or political identity. Here, the memory of royal power, Brahmanical tradition, Buddhist contact, Jain tradition, commercial life, and developing cultural memory appear together, in a long historical sequence.

The history of Ayodhya is not the story of a single dynasty; it is the long-term cultural journey of a city amid changing political powers.

References

1. Ashoka's rock edicts – the Corpus of Inscriptions of Asoka and related epigraphic studies.

2. The Arthashastra – an important source for the study of Mauryan-period state and administration, although its date and compilation are a subject of scholarly discussion.

3. Hans T. Bakker, Ayodhyā: The History of Ayodhyā from the 7th Century BC to the Middle of the 18th Century.

4. The Dhanadeva-Ayodhya Inscription – first century BCE/CE, found at the Ranopali monastery, Ayodhya; an important

inscription for the study of the political and religious history of early historical Ayodhya.

5. Archaeological and epigraphic studies relating to early Indian history and the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods.

Part 6: The Changing Form of Ayodhya from the Post-Mauryan Period to the Gupta Age

1. The New Political Landscape of Post-Mauryan India

After the decline of the Mauryan empire, no single power was immediately established in northern India that controlled the entire region in the same manner. In its place, many regional powers came to the fore. After Shunga and Kanva power, the influence of political powers coming from the north-west and of local dynasties is visible in different regions.

This political fragmentation must have affected Ayodhya as well. But this did not mean that Ayodhya's importance ended. Rather, the role of cities kept changing amid changing political circumstances.

2. The Mention of Saketa

The name Saketa is found in early historical sources. Saketa is regarded as an important city in Buddhist literature and other sources. The question of the relationship between Ayodhya and Saketa has long been a subject of discussion among historians. Some scholars regard the two as belonging to the same city or the same urban region. On the other hand, some older studies have also considered the possibility of a distinction between the

two. It would not, therefore, be proper in this book to treat both names as identical, in every period, without evidence.

3. Ayodhya and Saketa: A Cautious Conclusion

Viewing the available sources, the more balanced perspective is that the historical relationship between Ayodhya and Saketa is extremely important, but it is necessary to examine the use of the two names, and their geographical relationship, separately in different periods, on the basis of sources. This subject is not merely a question of names. Behind it lies the entire story of the city's political history, commercial standing, and religious prestige.

4. The Broad Background of the Kushana Age

The rise of Kushana power was an important event in the history of northern India. Kushana influence spread, in various stages, from north-western India to the Ganga-Yamuna region. Kanishka is regarded as the most celebrated ruler of this dynasty. In the Kushana period, particular importance was given to trade contacts, especially routes connected with north-western and Central Asia. This increased cultural contact among various regions of the Indian subcontinent.

5. Was Ayodhya Directly a Kushana Capital?

It would not be historically proper to state that Ayodhya was the capital of the Kushana empire. The principal political centres of

the Kushanas were in the north-west and other regions of northern India. Ayodhya's relationship with Kushana power is a separate question, and should be viewed on the basis of local archaeological and numismatic evidence. It is, therefore, necessary in this book to avoid the exaggerated notion of calling Ayodhya the Kushana capital.

6. The Expansion of Trade Contacts

In the Kushana age, trade contacts between India and Central Asia expanded. The vast trade network connected with the Silk Road played a role in connecting various regions. The Ganga region, too, was not separate from these broad economic processes. For cities such as Ayodhya, such circumstances could increase the possibilities of economic and cultural contact. But local evidence is necessary to establish the direct relationship of any particular trade route with Ayodhya.

7. Information Obtained from Coins

Coins are an extremely important source in the political and economic history of ancient cities. Coins obtained from a region can give us information about political contact, economic activity, trade, currency circulation, and, at times, governmental control. But merely finding the coin of some dynasty does not prove that that dynasty directly ruled over that entire region for a long time. The

archaeological layer and findspot-context of the coin are also important.

8. The Local Political Life of Ayodhya

Even amid large empires, local dynasties and rulers played an important role. The study of local coins and epigraphic evidence relating to Ayodhya indicates that political activities also occurred in this region locally – as is made clear by the coins of the Deva dynasty mentioned in Part 5. The complete genealogy and political extent of these local powers is still a subject of historians' study. Where sources are incomplete, therefore, it will be more scientific to mention the available evidence, rather than presenting a definite genealogy.

9. The Continuity of Religious Life

Political power kept changing, but religious traditions do not end at the same time. This very feature is visible in Ayodhya. Brahmanical traditions, Buddhist contact, and Jain traditions must have remained active here, or in its broader region, at different times. The later tradition of devotion to Ram further strengthened the identity of Ayodhya. The religious history of Ayodhya should, therefore, be viewed not as a straight line, but as the mutual presence and change of many traditions.

10. The Rise of the Gupta Empire

Around the fourth century CE, Gupta power arose in northern India. Under the reigns of Chandragupta I, Samudragupta, and Chandragupta II, Gupta authority established broad political influence. In Indian history, the Gupta age is given particular importance for the development of art, literature, religion, and political organization. Ayodhya, too, was part of this broad North Indian political and cultural environment.

11. Samudragupta and Northern India

Samudragupta's Prayaga Prashasti inscription gives important information about his military campaigns and political relationships. This inscription mentions many kings and kingdoms. This source helps us understand the political geography of fourth-century northern India. But it would not be proper to draw the direct conclusion that Ayodhya is presented in it, independently, as a major capital. It should be used only to the extent to which the inscription actually states.

An important historical debate is also notable here – some modern historians (such as scholars of JNU) argue that the identification of the mythic Ayodhya of the Ramayana with the present-day city of Ayodhya was completed precisely in the Gupta period (roughly the fourth-fifth century), and that the process of identifying Saketa as Ayodhya began in the early centuries and was established in the Gupta period. This is a subject of scholarly

debate, not an undisputed fact, and it will be presented in the book in precisely this form.

12. The Importance of Ayodhya in the Gupta Age

In the Gupta age, Brahmanical religious traditions received important royal patronage in northern India. Religious traditions relating to Vishnu, Shiva, and the Goddess developed in various regions. The tradition of Ram, too, was part of the broad Indian Vaishnav cultural world. Cultural relationships can be considered between Ayodhya's earlier Ram-memory and the Gupta-period Vaishnav environment. But to say that the Gupta rulers re-established Ayodhya in that same form as the capital of Ram would require sufficient direct evidence.

13. Gupta-Period Art and Religion

The Gupta age is regarded as an important period in the development of Indian sculpture and religious art. The sculpture of Vishnu, Shiva, the Goddess, and other deities developed in various regions during this time. The Ram narrative, too, remained continuously alive in Indian literature and religious tradition. Its importance for Ayodhya lies in the fact that the cultural memory connected with Ram was not confined to any single political period. This memory continued to take on new religious and artistic forms over time.

14. Faxian and Ayodhya

The Chinese Buddhist traveller Faxian journeyed to India at the beginning of the fifth century. His travel account gives important information about the Buddhist religious sites and Indian society of that time. His account mentions a place connected with the name Sha-chi, which some scholars have attempted to connect with Saketa/Ayodhya. But discussion has also occurred among scholars regarding the geographical identification of such travel accounts (as mentioned in W. Vost's 1905 study, referred to in Part 1 of Chapter 9). It is, therefore, proper to present this as a source-based historical debate, rather than as a definite identification.

15. Xuanzang's Account

In the seventh century, the Chinese traveller Xuanzang came to India. He gave important accounts relating to the Ayodhya region and the Buddhist sites connected with it. His travel account makes clear that, up to that time, the Buddhist memory of the Ayodhya region had not entirely ended. At the same time, the Brahmanical and Vaishnav identity of Ayodhya also remained strong in later periods. This fact is important for understanding the plurality of the religious history of Ayodhya.

16. Many Religious Memories in a Single City

One of the most interesting features of the history of Ayodhya is that different religious traditions connected this territory with their own respective memories. The memory of Ram and the Ikshvaku dynasty in Brahmanical tradition. The memory of Buddhist sites and the Sangha in Buddhist tradition. Traditions relating to the Tirthankaras in Jain tradition. Later, the broad expansion of Vaishnav and Ram-devotional traditions. This multi-layered religious memory gives Ayodhya a place among the distinctive cultural cities of Indian civilization.

17. The Distinction between Ayodhya's Political and Religious Standing

An important historical distinction becomes clear by the time we reach the Gupta and post-Gupta period. A city's political importance and religious importance are not identical. A capital can change, dynasties can change, an administrative centre can move to another city. But a pilgrimage site and religious memory can remain for a long time. The history of Ayodhya is an excellent example for understanding precisely this distinction.

18. Ram's Ayodhya in Literature

Over time, the Ram narrative spread across various Indian languages and literary traditions. The various forms of the Ramayana kept Ayodhya at the centre of Indian cultural imagination. Here, we should again remember the distinction

between history and literature. The popularity of the Ram narrative is not direct proof of the existence of any particular historical building. But it certainly shows that the cultural memory of Ayodhya remained extremely influential and long-lived.

19. The Role of Archaeology

Archaeology is important in understanding the antiquity of Ayodhya. Pottery, bricks, building remains, coins, sculpture, and other objects obtained from archaeological excavation help in the study of the material culture of the city's various periods. But archaeology, too, has its own limits. The finding of an object does not automatically determine its religious meaning. Its context, date, and stratum are all important.

20. The Long-Term Journey of Ayodhya

From the study so far, a broad picture of Ayodhya emerges – the tradition of Kosala, the age of the Mahajanapadas, the expansion of Magadha, the Mauryan empire, post-Mauryan powers, the broad Kushana-period contacts, the Gupta age, and later religious-cultural traditions. This is not a single straight political line. It is a sequence of many political and cultural layers.

Conclusion of Part 6

The story of Ayodhya, from the post-Mauryan period to the Gupta age, brings forward both political change and cultural continuity

together. Great empires came and went. Local powers arose. Trade contacts changed. Religious traditions developed. But the cultural memory of Ayodhya remained.

The Kushana age connected northern India to a broad trade and cultural network. In the Gupta age, Brahmanical and Vaishnav religious culture received new expansion. The accounts of Buddhist travellers show that the Buddhist memories of Ayodhya, too, remained alive for a long time.

It would, therefore, diminish history to regard Ayodhya as the gift of a single dynasty or a single religious period. Ayodhya's greatest strength has not been its political power, but its extraordinary cultural continuity.

References

1. Samudragupta's Prayaga Prashasti.

2. Faxian – Record of Buddhist Kingdoms.

3. Xuanzang – Great Tang Records on the Western Regions.

4. Hans T. Bakker – Ayodhyā: The History of Ayodhyā from the 7th Century BC to the Middle of the 18th Century.

5. Epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeological studies relating to Ayodhya.

6. Modern research relating to early Indian history and the political-cultural history of the Gupta period.

CHAPTER 11

Ayodhya in the Accounts of Foreign Travellers and Ancient Itineraries (Parts 1–8)

An Independent Review for the Research Treatise of Naresh Das Vaishnav 'Nimbark'

Summary

The principal historical-factual material of all eight Parts of Chapter 11 – in particular, the figures given in Xuanzang's account of Ayodhya, Faxian's dates, the accounts of William Finch and Tieffenthaler, and the facts relating to the 2019 Supreme Court judgment – has been checked against primary and authoritative sources (Samuel Beal's English translation, James Legge's translation of Faxian, and Supreme Court reporting). Most facts were found to be correct and accurate. A review of each Part is given below – a ✓ mark is used where confirmation was obtained, a ⚠ mark where caution is needed in wording, and a △ mark where an important fact has been omitted.

Parts 1-2: An Initial Introduction to Faxian and Xuanzang

1. The Figures in Xuanzang's Account of Ayodhya (100 sangharamas, 3,000 monks, 10 deva-temples)

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

According to Samuel Beal's English translation (1884), Xuanzang's original account gives exactly these figures: 'There are about 100 saṅghārāmas in the country and 3000 priests... There are ten Deva temples.' The circumference of the kingdom, 5,000 li, and the capital, roughly 20 li, are also correct. The mention of the sangharama connected with Vasubandhu, of the bodhisattva Asanga, and of the 200-foot Ashokan stupa (on the bank of the Ganga, north of the city) also fully matches the original text.

Source: Samuel Beal, Buddhist Records of the Western World, Book V, Chapter 2 – Country of 'O-yu-t'o (Ayodhya).

2. The Connection of the Name 'O-yu-t'o', Used by Xuanzang, with Ayodhya

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

It is correct that all four principal translators – Julien, Beal, Watters, and Rongxi – have presented this name precisely as Ayodhya, as stated in the chapter.

Source: Nalanda-Insatiable in Offering blog; Beal 1884.

3. The Dates of Faxian's Journey to India (roughly 399-414 CE)

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

This date (399-414 CE) is recorded in the very title of James Legge's translation, and fully matches the date given in the chapter.

Source: James Legge, A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms (1886).

4. An Important Omission — Cunningham's Own Doubt Regarding the Identification

△ Important omission / worth adding

In a footnote to Beal's translation, it is itself noted that geographical difficulties exist in connecting 'O-yu-t'o' with modern Ayodhya — the correspondence of distance and direction does not fit well. Seeing this difficulty, General Cunningham himself also suggested that this place might actually be the ancient city of 'Kakupur', near Kanpur, rather than present-day Ayodhya. This particular caution is not yet included in the book, even though it is precisely the kind of source-review that the book itself emphasizes (Part 1 states that 'it is necessary to compare linguistic, geographical, and historical evidence'). It is suggested that the following line be added in Part 2 or Part 5: 'In a note to Beal's translation, Cunningham himself questions this identification and suggests an alternative site (Kakupur, near Kanpur), although most translators regard O-yu-t'o as Ayodhya itself.'

Source: Beal 1884, Book V, Chapter 2, footnote 1 (citing Cunningham, Ancient Geography of India, p. 385).

Parts 3-5: Xuanzang's Detailed Account, Vasubandhu, and the Saketa-Ayodhya Question

5. The Account Relating to Vasubandhu and Asanga

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

Beal's translation contains, in precisely the form presented in the chapter, the account of Vasubandhu residing in Ayodhya for decades to compose treatises, and of the bodhisattva Asanga receiving the Yogacharya-shastra there. This passage is accurate from a research standpoint.

Source: Beal 1884, Book V, Chapter 2.

6. Alexander Cunningham's Connection of 'Pi-so-kia' with Saketa

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

It is generally correct that Cunningham attempted various identifications on the basis of the accounts of Chinese travellers, and the book's caution in presenting this as a 'scholarly hypothesis' (rather than the traveller's direct statement) is methodologically sound. For a line-by-line independent verification of this specific name, direct examination of Cunningham's original work, The Ancient Geography of India, would be appropriate.

Source: general source-based confirmation; direct verification from Cunningham's original work still pending.

Parts 6-7: Medieval and European Travellers — William Finch, Thomas Herbert, Tieffenthaler

7. William Finch's Dates (1608-1611) and Account

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

This is fully correct. Finch remained in India between 1608 and 1611, and his account was later published in Early Travels in India, compiled by William Foster. He mentioned, at Ayodhya, the ruins of a fort and houses connected with Ramchandra, and the Brahmins who recorded the names of the pilgrims bathing there — this account was also cited in the 2019 Supreme Court judgment.

Source: Wikipedia — William Finch (merchant); Business Standard, 14 August 2019 (Supreme Court proceedings); Gulf News, Supreme Court verdict report.

8. The Absence of Any Mention of a Mosque in Finch's Account

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

This is factually correct, and the book's caution ('not to treat a source's silence as final proof') is also methodologically proper. This is precisely the point that also arose in judicial argument.

Source: Digital Pradesh, 'Top 10 facts about the Ayodhya Verdict'.

9. The Date of Thomas Herbert – the Precision of 'A Few Decades Later'

⚠ Caution required

Thomas Herbert's account of Ayodhya is dated to 1634, which is roughly 23 years after Finch (1608-1611). The phrase used in the book, 'a few decades later' (Part 7), is broadly correct, but for greater precision, a clearer statement such as 'in the 1630s' or 'roughly two decades later' would be preferable.

Source: Digital Pradesh (Herbert's account dated 1634).

10. Joseph Tieffenthaler – Dates and Account

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

Tieffenthaler was a Jesuit missionary and geographer who remained in India between 1743 and 1785, and who visited Ayodhya in 1767; the French translation of his Latin work, Descriptio Indiae, was published in 1788. These dates match the account given in the book.

Source: Digital Pradesh, 'Top 10 facts about the Ayodhya Verdict'.

11. An Important Omission – the Most-Cited Passage of Tieffenthaler's Account Is Missing

△ Important omission / worth adding

The passage of Tieffenthaler's account that is most frequently cited in historiography and in judicial argument is not included in the present chapter: he wrote that Aurangzeb (reigned 1658-1707) demolished the Ramkot fort — which included the structure regarded as the birthplace of Ram — and built, in its place, a mosque with three domes; he also recorded that 'some people say that it was built by Babur.' This account is regarded as one of Tieffenthaler's most important contributions to the historiography of Ayodhya. Since the book's purpose is to present 'source-based history, rising above faith and controversy,' including this passage in Part 7 would make the chapter more complete and balanced — particularly because the book already follows the principle of 'stating only as much as is proven' on subjects of construction and demolition.

Source: Digital Pradesh, 'Top 10 facts about the Ayodhya Verdict' (citing Tieffenthaler, Descriptio Indiae, French translation, 1788).

Part 8: Conclusion and the 2019 Supreme Court Judgment

12. The Supreme Court Judgment — Date, Bench, and Mention of Travel Accounts

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

The judgment was delivered unanimously on 9 November 2019, by a five-judge bench headed by the then Chief Justice Ranjan

Gogoi. The Court clearly cited the travel accounts of Finch and Tieffenthaler as historical evidence of Hindus' faith, religious memory, and tradition of worship — precisely as stated in Parts 7 and 8 of the chapter. The Court also made clear that 'title cannot be established on the basis of faith and belief alone' — this point of balance accords with the book's source-review method, and, if desired, this judicial citation could also be added to Part 8.

Source: Gulf News, 'SC took note of travelogues to cement Hindus' claim on Ayodhya land'; ISAS Briefs No. 720, Ronojoy Sen.

13. The Mention of Montgomery Martin

⚠ Caution required

The general context of Martin's account (the colonial gazetteer tradition, writing from the late eighteenth to nineteenth century) is in the right direction, and it is also mentioned in the Court's judgment. However, Martin's precise date, the name of the work (generally, The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, 1838), and a substantive passage from his account are not yet given in the book. It would be proper to give this a little more extension in Part 8.

Source: Gulf News Supreme Court verdict report (general mention); extension still pending in the book.

Overall Conclusion and Suggestions

In this review, the principal historical material of all eight Parts of Chapter 11 — in particular, the numerical facts (100 sangharamas, 3,000 monks, 10 deva-temples, the 200-foot stupa), and the dates (Faxian, 399-414; Finch, 1608-1611; Tieffenthaler, 1743-1785/1767; the Supreme Court judgment, 9 November 2019) — was checked against authoritative translations and reports. No factual error was found. The book's source-review method (keeping clear the distinction between travel account and scholarly interpretation) is already of a high standard.

Two points were found worth adding, which, in accordance with the book's own principles, would make the chapter more complete —

(a) Cunningham's own doubt that 'O-yu-t'o' might not be modern Ayodhya, but some other place near Kanpur — in Part 2/Part 5.

(b) The local tradition relating to Aurangzeb/Babur (concerning the construction of the mosque), as recorded by Tieffenthaler — in Part 7.

Both these additions would further strengthen the factual completeness of the chapter, and would give still better effect to the book's fundamental principle — 'where disagreement exists, to

place that disagreement before the reader rather than concealing it.'

This report is based on authoritative sources available online (Samuel Beal's translation, James Legge's translation, news and research reports). For extremely specific line-by-line

CHAPTER 12

Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence of Ancient Ayodhya (Parts 1–6)

An Independent Review for the Research Treatise of Naresh Das Vaishnav 'Nimbark'

Summary

The principal facts mentioned in the six Parts of Chapter 12 – the Dhanadeva inscription, Pushyamitra, B. B. Lal's excavation, the 2003 ASI excavation, the pillar bases, and the 2019 Supreme Court judgment – were checked against authoritative Wikipedia entries, research articles, news reports, and academic sources. Most facts were found to be correct. In one place (the history of B. B. Lal's excavation), the account of an important historical process is missing, and adding it would accord with the book's own principle ('presenting evidence as evidence, and interpretation as interpretation').

Parts 1-3: Archaeological Method, Pottery, and Coins

1. The Date and General Description of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

It is correct that NBPW is a well-known pottery tradition of early historical sites in northern India, generally connected with the middle of the first millennium BCE. The book's caution that this should not be directly connected with any specific religious/epic period is also proper, and accords with standard archaeological method.

Source: confirmed from general archaeological literature.

2. General Methodological Cautions (Stratigraphy/Context, Evidence versus Interpretation)

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

The archaeological method described in Parts 1-3 (stratum, context, the need for independent evidence) accords with standard academic archaeological principles and requires no correction.

Source: general methodology — no specific factual claim remains to be verified.

Part 4: The Dhanadeva Inscription

3. The Dhanadeva Inscription — Language, Script, Content

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

This inscription is in the Sanskrit language and the Brahmi script, as stated in the book. It mentions Kosaladhipa Dhanadeva (son of Phalgudeva), who is stated to be the sixth generation in the

lineage of the general Pushyamitra, and it mentions Pushyamitra's performance of two Ashvamedha yajnas – all these details are correct.

Source: Wikipedia – 'Ayodhya Inscription of Dhana'; Studocu historical overview.

4. The Identification of Pushyamitra with Pushyamitra Shunga

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

The book's language – 'generally connected with Pushyamitra Shunga' – is appropriately cautious. Most sources do regard this as definitely Pushyamitra Shunga (this is regarded as the earliest epigraphic evidence of Shunga control over Ayodhya), but the book's cautious wording is scientifically proper.

Source: Testbook (UPSC study material); Studocu.

5. The Date of the Inscription – 'Around the First Century BCE'

⚠ Caution required

This is broadly correct, but slight disagreement exists among scholars – some sources (such as D. C. Sircar) date it, on palaeographic grounds, to the first century CE, while others regard it as belonging to the end of the first century BCE. It would be proper to add the following in the book: 'There is also slight disagreement among scholars regarding the date – some regard it

as belonging to the first century BCE, and others to the first century CE.'

Source: Wikipedia – 'Ayodhya Inscription of Dhana' (citing D. C. Sircar).

Part 2, 5-6: B. B. Lal's Excavation and the Pillar Bases

6. B. B. Lal's Project – Dates and Name

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

The project 'Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites' began in 1975, and work was carried out at five sites, including Ayodhya (Ayodhya, Bharadwaj Ashram, Nandigram, Chitrakuta, Shringaverapura) – as stated in the book. Excavation at Ayodhya took place in three seasons: 1975-76, 1976-77, and 1979-80.

Source: The Wire, 'B.B. Lal and the Making of Hindutva Archaeology'; Dharmapedia Wiki.

7. An Important Omission – the History of the Gradual Expansion of B. B. Lal's Findings

△ Important omission / worth adding

Part 2 of the book states that 'in later years, he presented an interpretation of certain architectural remains and pillar bases. But disagreement has also existed among scholars regarding the interpretation of his findings' – this is correct, but incomplete.

According to documented records, B. B. Lal's claims expanded in stages over time: (a) in 1977, he himself wrote, in the ASI's official journal, that the findings at Ayodhya were 'devoid of any special interest'; (b) in 1989, twelve years later, in a seven-page preliminary report, he mentioned only 'pillar bases'; (c) in 1990, after retirement, he claimed, in the RSS journal Manthan (not in any research journal), that there were 'remains of a pillared temple' there; (d) by 2008, this claim had expanded to 'twelve pillars bearing Hindu symbols and figures of deities.' Importantly, a detailed report of the excavation was never published in any respected research journal – only two brief mentions appeared in the ASI's Indian Archaeology: A Review. The archaeologist Dhaneshwar Mandal later wrote a book offering a detailed critique of these claims. Since the present book itself adopts the principle of 'presenting evidence as evidence, interpretation as interpretation, and disagreement as disagreement' (Part 2, point 12), adding this documented timeline would accord with the book's own principle, and would be extremely relevant.

Source: The Print, 'B.B. Lal–first archaeologist who showed proof that Ayodhya was no mythology' (11 September 2022); The Wire, 'B.B. Lal and the Making of Hindutva Archaeology'; Wikipedia – B. B. Lal; Dharmapedia Wiki – Dhaneshwar Mandal.

8. Scholarly Disagreement over the Pillar Bases

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

It is correct that serious disagreement has existed among scholars regarding the identification and interpretation of the pillar bases. The historian Romila Thapar advised caution, while the archaeologist Dhaneshwar Mandal wrote an entire critical book on the subject. The book's language ('some scholars raised questions') correctly reflects this reality, although adding the background described in point 7 would make this section more complete.

Source: Times Life, 'Ramayana vs. Archaeology'; Dharmapedia Wiki — Dhaneshwar Mandal.

Part 6: The 2003 Excavation and the 2019 Supreme Court Judgment

9. The 2003 ASI Excavation — on the Court's Direction

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

It is correct that this excavation was carried out by the Archaeological Survey of India in 2003, on the order of the Allahabad High Court, and that its report became an important piece of evidence in subsequent judicial proceedings.

Source: ISAS Briefs No. 718, Vinod Rai.

10. The 2019 Judgment – 'The Underlying Structure Was Not Islamic, but Demolition Was Not Proven'

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

This is the most sensitive but most accurate statement of the book. The Supreme Court did indeed hold that the structure found beneath the disputed structure 'was not of Islamic origin', and at the same time made clear that the ASI could not prove that a temple had been demolished to build a mosque. The Court stated only that, on the 'balance of probabilities', the underlying structure appeared to be temple-like, and that temple material was used in the construction of the mosque. This fully accords with the statement in Part 6, point 10, of the book.

Source: Deccan Herald, 'Ayodhya verdict explained in 5 points'; National Herald India; CBS News, 9 November 2019.

11. The Date of the Judgment and the Bench

✓ Confirmed (verified against sources)

The judgment was delivered unanimously on 9 November 2019, by a five-judge bench – this was also verified in the review of Chapter 11.

Source: ISAS Briefs No. 720.

Overall Conclusion and Suggestions

The factual foundation of Chapter 12 is, on the whole, strong — the Dhanadeva inscription, the Ashvamedha, NBPW, the 2003 excavation, and the 2019 judgment all correspond with authoritative sources. The book's cautious style of language (keeping evidence, interpretation, and disagreement distinct) is already of a high standard.

One important addition is suggested —

the documented, gradual expansion of B. B. Lal's findings from 1977 to 2008 (in Part 2/Part 6) — this is precisely the kind of information that the book itself resolves to present as 'the honest language of research' (Part 6, point 14). Including this would further strengthen the impartiality of the book, and would enable the reader to see, for themselves, that the platform of publication of a claim (a research journal versus a popular magazine) is also an important part of source review.

This report is based on authoritative sources available online (Wikipedia, news reports, ISAS research briefs, academic articles). Direct examination of the original lines of the Dhanadeva inscription, and of the original text of the ASI's 2003 report, is recommended for still deeper verification.

ETERNAL AYODHYA

The Birthplace of Shri Ram and Indian Civilization

Researcher: Naresh Das Vaishnav Nimbark

CHAPTER 13

Literary Sources of Ayodhya and the Perspective of Travellers

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Chapter 13 · Part 1

From Texts to Travelogues — the Historical Memory of Ayodhya

The history of Ayodhya is not found only in the archaeological remains preserved beneath the soil. The memory of Ayodhya has also remained preserved, in various forms, in Indian literature, religious texts, epics, Puranas, Buddhist and Jain traditions, and the accounts of foreign travellers.

In studying these sources, the most important thing to understand is that each source has its own purpose, its own period, and its own perspective. One text expresses religious and cultural tradition; another expresses the prestige of a dynasty; a traveller describes the city he has seen with his own eyes; and a later author presents earlier traditions in the language of his own time.

It is, therefore, necessary to read all these sources together in order to understand the history of Ayodhya, but it would not be proper to regard them as the same kind of evidence.

1. The Valmiki Ramayana and Ayodhya

In the literary memory of Ayodhya, the place of the Valmiki Ramayana is extremely important.

In the Ramayana's Ayodhya-centred description, the image of a prosperous, organized, and royal city is visible. The description of King Dasharatha, the royal family, highways, buildings, gardens, civic life, and religious activities presents Ayodhya as an ideal royal city.

This Ayodhya of the Ramayana is not merely a geographical location. It becomes, in Indian cultural consciousness, a city bound up with dharma, propriety, ideal governance, and the life of Shri Ram.

But an important question for the historian is in which periods the present text of the Ramayana was composed and compiled.

Scholars hold various views regarding the composition of the Ramayana and the development of its text. It would not, therefore, be proper to treat every detail described in the text, in that very form, as a contemporary archaeological report.

2. Literary Memory and Historical Geography

The Ayodhya described in the Ramayana appears connected with the river Sarayu and the janapada of Kosala.

This geographical context is important, for it helps in understanding Ayodhya within the broader region of Kosala.

In literary sources, the description of a city is not merely a description of its buildings. It also incorporates the religious beliefs, royal system, and social ideals connected with that city.

In studying Ayodhya in the Ramayana, therefore, we should consider two levels – first, Ayodhya's geographical and political context; second, Ayodhya's cultural and religious memory.

The two are connected with one another, but should not be regarded as the same kind of historical evidence.

3. The Ayodhya of the Ramayana and Archaeological Ayodhya

In Chapter 12, we saw that archaeology gives us information about the material layers of Ayodhya. The Ramayana, on the other hand, provides us with the literary and cultural image of Ayodhya.

When the two are read together, an important research question arises – is any similarity visible between the urban life described in literature and the urban evidence obtained from archaeology?

It would not be proper to answer this question with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Some broad similarities may be worthy of research, but independent evidence is necessary to connect a literary description with any specific archaeological structure.

4. Ayodhya in the Puranas

Besides the Ramayana, traditions relating to Ayodhya and Shri Ram are also found in many Puranas.

The Puranas are vast collections of Indian religious-cultural tradition. Within them are preserved genealogies, pilgrimage-glorification, religious narratives, geography, and many kinds of cultural memory.

The importance of the Puranas, in relation to Ayodhya, also lies in the fact that they help us understand the traditions that established this city as a place of pilgrimage and sacred geography.

But the process of the composition of the Puranas has been a long one. It is, therefore, necessary to study the date and historical utility of any particular Puranic account separately.

5. The Pilgrimage-Glorification of Ayodhya

Over time, Ayodhya did not remain confined to the memory of an ancient royal city alone. It developed into an important place of pilgrimage.

In pilgrimage-glorification literature, a description is found of Ayodhya's various ghats, ponds, temples, and religious sites. This literature helps us understand how the religious geography of Ayodhya was imagined in different periods.

A literary description of a pilgrimage site can be an important source of that place's religious prestige, but it does not, by itself, prove the antiquity of any structure currently visible at that place.

6. Ayodhya in Buddhist Tradition

The historical memory of Ayodhya has not remained confined to the Ram narrative alone. Mentions relating to Ayodhya and Saketa are found in Buddhist literature and the accounts of travellers.

The study of Buddhist tradition reveals that the ancient cities of northern India were in contact with many religious traditions.

It is, therefore, more proper to view the history of Ayodhya not merely from a single religious standpoint, but within the broad Indian religious and social environment of that time.

7. Ayodhya in Jain Tradition

Ayodhya also holds particular importance in Jain tradition. According to Jain tradition, some Tirthankaras are held to have been born in Ayodhya. This makes the religious importance of Ayodhya multi-traditional.

This fact is important for history, for it shows that the religious memory of Ayodhya developed, in different forms, across various Indian traditions.

An important method of understanding Ayodhya, therefore, is also to read the Ayodhya of the Ramayana, the Ayodhya of Buddhist tradition, and the Ayodhya of Jain tradition as separate sources.

8. Saketa and Ayodhya

The name Saketa is also found in ancient Indian literature. Historians have studied various sources regarding the relationship between Ayodhya and Saketa.

Many scholars connect the two with different name-traditions of the same region or city, while their historical usages and contexts require more careful study.

This question is important because Saketa is mentioned in the accounts of foreign travellers and in Buddhist literature, while Ayodhya is the principal name in the tradition of the Ramayana. The study of these names helps in understanding the historical geography of the ancient city.

9. The Perspective of Chinese Travellers

The accounts of Chinese Buddhist travellers are extremely important in the study of the history of Ayodhya. In particular, travellers such as Faxian and Xuanzang journeyed to India and described various cities, religious sites, and Buddhist institutions.

The accounts of these travellers are important for Indian history because they present an outside perspective, distinct from Indian sources.

But their accounts, too, should be read with care. They came to India chiefly for the purpose of seeking out Buddhist religious sites and undertaking pilgrimage, so it is natural that their accounts pay particular attention to Buddhist monasteries and religious sites.

10. Faxian's Account

The Chinese Buddhist traveller Faxian journeyed to India at the beginning of the fifth century.

His travel account provides information about various Buddhist sites and religious institutions of northern India.

In studying his account relating to Ayodhya, it should be kept in mind that he was observing the religious institutions available there in his own time.

His account, therefore, helps us understand the condition of Ayodhya of that period, but the direct condition of the Ayodhya of the Ramayana period cannot be determined from it.

11. Xuanzang's Account of Ayodhya

In the seventh century, the Chinese traveller Xuanzang came to India. His travel account gives a detailed mention of Ayodhya and the surrounding region.

Xuanzang mentioned Buddhist monasteries and other religious sites in this region. This indicates that, at that time, the Ayodhya region was also an important part of Buddhist religious geography.

His account holds particular importance because it gives information about the size of the city, its religious institutions, and its geographical position.

12. The Limits of Travellers' Accounts

The accounts of foreign travellers are extremely useful, but they, too, cannot be regarded as the final and complete history.

A traveller recorded only what he saw. He described in greater detail the sites that interested him. He may have paid greater attention to the institutions connected with the tradition to which he himself belonged.

Travel accounts, therefore, need to be read together with archaeology, inscriptions, and Indian literature.

13. Comparing Different Sources

The strongest method of understanding the history of Ayodhya is the comparative study of various sources –

the Ramayana: religious and cultural memory. The Puranas: pilgrimage, dynasty, and religious tradition. Buddhist-Jain literature: multi-religious historical context. Chinese travellers: the account of an outside eyewitness. Inscriptions: written evidence of names, donations, dynasties, and institutions. Archaeology: material remains and cultural layers.

When all these are read together, a broader picture of the history of Ayodhya comes to the fore.

Conclusion of Part 1

The historical memory of Ayodhya is preserved in many sources. The Valmiki Ramayana established it as the royal city of Shri Ram and the centre of Indian cultural consciousness. The Puranas extended its pilgrimage-glorification. Buddhist and Jain traditions gave it a place in their religious geography. Chinese travellers presented an account of the Ayodhya of their own time and its religious institutions.

The importance of all these sources differs, and their limits also differ.

In the research of Eternal Ayodhya, therefore, our perspective will remain that no single source should be regarded as the complete history. Reading literature, archaeology, inscriptions, and travel

accounts together, with one another, is the more balanced path to understanding the long history of Ayodhya.

In the Part that follows, we shall undertake a comparative study, in particular, of the accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang, and see how ancient and early medieval Ayodhya appeared to them.

Chapter 13 • Part 2

Ayodhya through the Eyes of Faxian and Xuanzang

The accounts of foreign travellers hold particular importance in understanding the history of Ayodhya. While Indian texts present Ayodhya as religious, cultural, and royal memory, the accounts of Chinese Buddhist travellers give us a different perspective.

These travellers journeyed to India chiefly for the study of Buddhism, pilgrimage to sacred sites, and the search for Buddhist texts. Their accounts, therefore, contain particular mention of Buddhist monasteries, monks, stupas, and religious institutions.

Even so, their travel accounts are important for the history of Ayodhya, for they give information, from an outside perspective, about the city and its religious environment of that time.

1. Faxian's Journey to India

The Chinese Buddhist traveller Faxian came to India at roughly the beginning of the fifth century.

His principal purpose was to study and collect Vinaya texts and other religious material relating to Buddhism. He travelled to many regions of India and described the Buddhist institutions and religious traditions found there.

His travel account is important because it provides information about the religious and social environment of Gupta-period India.

2. Faxian and Ayodhya

In Faxian's account, indications are found of Buddhist traditions and institutions connected with the Ayodhya region.

His account helps us understand that, in his time, the Ayodhya region was also part of Buddhist religious geography. This information is important, for it makes clear that the religious identity of Ayodhya remained multi-layered across various stages of history.

But Faxian's purpose was not to write a complete history of Ayodhya. It is not, therefore, to be expected that his account would mention every religious site, building, or community of the city.

3. Faxian's Account and Its Limits

Faxian's account helps us understand the religious condition of his own time. But from it, we cannot draw the conclusion that only the Buddhist tradition was present in Ayodhya at that time.

A traveller's mention of a particular institution may be evidence of that institution's presence, but it is not evidence of the absence of other institutions.

This is an important principle of historiography – the absence of mention of something in a source is not, by itself, proof that that thing did not exist.

Faxian's account should, therefore, be read within the context of his purpose and his time.

4. Xuanzang's Arrival in India

Roughly two centuries later, in the seventh century, another celebrated Chinese Buddhist traveller, Xuanzang, came to India. His arrival in India is connected with the period of Emperor Harshavardhana.

Xuanzang travelled to many regions of India and presented a detailed account of his experiences. His travel account is more extensive than that of Faxian, and it therefore holds particular importance in the study of Indian history.

5. Xuanzang's Ayodhya

Xuanzang described the Ayodhya region and mentioned many Buddhist institutions there. His account indicates that, at that time, Ayodhya was an important religious and cultural region.

He mentioned Buddhist monasteries and monks, and regarded this region as important from the standpoint of Buddhist study.

This account brings forward an important fact in the history of Ayodhya – the religious identity of Ayodhya kept changing and expanding over time. In the tradition of the Ramayana, this is the city of Shri Ram; in the accounts of Buddhist travellers, it appears as a region connected with Buddhist institutions; in later periods, it becomes a principal centre of Vaishnav devotion and devotion to Ram.

It is more proper to understand these different layers not as being in opposition to one another, but as different stages of the long cultural history of Ayodhya.

6. Monasteries and Monks

Xuanzang's account mentions the number of Buddhist monasteries in the Ayodhya region, and the monks living there. This information is important because it allows an estimate of the religious institutional system of that time.

Monasteries were not merely places of religious worship. They were also centres of study, residence, education, and the preservation of Buddhist texts.

Xuanzang's account, therefore, is also useful in the study of the educational and intellectual history of Ayodhya.

7. Buddhist Tradition and Ayodhya

Xuanzang's account reveals many memories connecting Ayodhya with the Buddhist tradition. This makes clear that, up to the seventh century, Ayodhya was connected not merely with the memory of the Ram narrative, but also with Buddhist religious tradition.

An important research principle comes to the fore here – the religious identity of a city need not be confined to a single tradition in a single period. Different religious communities and traditions can be influential in the same city at different times, and, at times, can also coexist at the same time.

8. Faxian and Xuanzang – A Comparative Perspective

Reading the accounts of both Chinese travellers together, an important picture of the history of Ayodhya comes to the fore. The principal attention of both travellers was on the Buddhist tradition, so it is natural that their accounts give greater mention to Buddhist institutions.

Comparative Table

Source: Faxian – Period: roughly the 5th century – Principal purpose: the study of Buddhism and its texts – Importance for the study of Ayodhya: the Gupta-period religious environment.

Source: Xuanzang – Period: roughly the 7th century – Principal purpose: Buddhist study and pilgrimage – Importance for the study of Ayodhya: a detailed religious and geographical account.

9. Are Travellers' Accounts the Final Evidence of History?

No. Travellers' accounts are important sources of history, but they are not the complete history.

A traveller selects places according to his own purpose; he writes local names in his own language; he records local traditions according to his own understanding; and he gives greater extension to whatever seems important to him.

It is, therefore, necessary to compare travel accounts with other sources.

10. Comparing Travel Accounts with Archaeology

If a traveller mentions a monastery or stupa at a place, and archaeological remains are also found in that same region, both sources can help in understanding one another.

But if a traveller has not mentioned a structure, it cannot be said, on this basis alone, that that structure did not exist.

Similarly, if the remains of a building are found through archaeology, a comparison of place, period, and architecture will

be necessary to connect it with a building described by a traveller.

11. The Multi-Religious History of Ayodhya

The accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang bring forward an important aspect of the history of Ayodhya – a multi-religious cultural presence.

It would not be sufficient to understand Ayodhya merely by looking at the sources of a single religious tradition. Alongside the Ramayana and Vaishnav tradition, the study of Buddhist and Jain sources is also necessary. This makes the historical journey of Ayodhya appear in a broader form.

12. Literature, Travel Accounts, and Archaeology

The history of Ayodhya can be viewed through three important windows – literature gives us cultural memory, travel accounts give us the perspective of an outside observer of a particular time, and archaeology gives us material remains.

Combining these three, a more balanced picture of history can be prepared. But the limits of the three are different. For this reason, no one source can be made a complete substitute for another.

13. Caution in Historiography

When writing on a subject such as Ayodhya, the accounts of foreign travellers, too, should not be presented in an exaggerated manner.

If Xuanzang described a Buddhist monastery, this gives us information about the existence of that monastery. But it cannot be concluded from this that other religious traditions did not exist in Ayodhya at that same time.

Similarly, if he did not mention a temple of Ram, his silence alone does not prove that the Ram tradition did not exist at that time. Silence, too, does not become evidence without context.

Conclusion of Part 2

The travel accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang are important external sources for the history of Ayodhya.

Faxian gives us information about India and the Buddhist religious environment of roughly the fifth century, while Xuanzang's detailed account is particularly useful for understanding the Ayodhya of the seventh century and the Buddhist institutions in its vicinity.

The accounts of these travellers bring forward a layer of the history of Ayodhya that tells us that this city remained in contact with various religious and cultural traditions.

But travel accounts have their own limits. It is, therefore, necessary to read them together with the Ramayana, the Puranas, Buddhist-Jain literature, inscriptions, and archaeological evidence.

The history of Ayodhya is not found complete in any single book, any single traveller, or any single excavation. It is constructed from the combined memory of many sources.

In the Part that follows, we shall look further at the Buddhist and Jain literary references to Ayodhya, and understand how the identity of Ayodhya developed within these traditions.

Chapter 13 · Part 3

Ayodhya in Buddhist and Jain Traditions

The historical identity of Ayodhya has developed through many religious and cultural traditions. Its fame, connected with the birthplace of Shri Ram and the Ikshvaku tradition, is extremely deep in Indian cultural memory. Alongside this, mentions of Ayodhya, or of city-traditions connected with it, are also found in Buddhist and Jain literature.

The study of these sources is necessary not in order to confine the history of Ayodhya to any single religious standpoint, but in order to understand how this region was remembered, in ancient India, among various religious traditions.

1. Ayodhya in Buddhist Literature

Mentions relating to Ayodhya and Saketa are found in Buddhist literature. Like other ancient Indian cities, these names have been used in various contexts across different texts and periods.

In Buddhist tradition, the importance of the Ayodhya region appears connected chiefly with Buddhist teachings, the monastic sangha, and religious activities.

The accounts of later Chinese travellers, too, help in understanding this historical memory of the Buddhist tradition.

2. The Importance of Saketa

The mention of Saketa in Buddhist literature is particularly important. Saketa was an important city of ancient northern India, and its mention is found in various contexts across literary sources.

Historians have long studied the identification of Ayodhya and Saketa. Many scholars connect them with the same city or with the name-traditions of a neighbouring region.

But it is necessary, in research, to keep in mind that, in identifying an ancient name with a modern city, mere similarity of name is not sufficient. A comparison of geographical position, literary context, archaeological material, and other sources is also necessary.

3. Buddhism and the Ayodhya Region

Studying the presence of Buddhism in the Ayodhya region helps us understand how religious traditions spread in ancient northern India.

Buddhist monasteries were important centres of education and religious life. Monks travelled from one place to another, and, through them, religious ideas spread.

Thus, the Buddhist history of the Ayodhya region is not merely religious history; it is also part of the ancient Indian history of education, travel, and cultural exchange.

4. Ayodhya in Jain Tradition

The importance of Ayodhya is even more particular in the tradition of Jainism. According to Jain tradition, Ayodhya is also connected with names such as Vinita and Saketa.

In Jain texts, Ayodhya is remembered as an important city connected with the birthplace of the Tirthankaras. In particular, according to Jain tradition, the first Tirthankara, Lord Rishabhadeva, the second Tirthankara, Ajitanatha, and some other Tirthankaras are held to have been born in Ayodhya.

This tradition gives the religious history of Ayodhya a broad Indian context.

5. Rishabhadeva and Ayodhya

According to Jain tradition, Lord Rishabhadeva was born in Ayodhya. His place in Jainism is extremely important, and he is regarded as the first Tirthankara.

The tradition of the Jain pilgrimage sites and temples situated in Ayodhya is connected with precisely this religious memory.

The necessary caution for the historian here is that the description of Jain religious tradition, and archaeological proof of an event, are two separate subjects. Religious tradition is itself an important cultural source, but independent sources are needed to establish its historical date.

6. Ayodhya and the Other Tirthankaras

In Jain tradition, Ayodhya is connected not with Rishabhadeva alone, but with other Tirthankaras as well. According to Jain tradition, Ayodhya was the birthplace of five Tirthankaras –

1. Rishabhadeva – the first Tirthankara. 2. Ajitanatha – the second Tirthankara. 3. Abhinandananatha – the fourth Tirthankara. 4. Sumatinatha – the fifth Tirthankara. 5. Anantanatha – the fourteenth Tirthankara.

This tradition gave Ayodhya an extremely important place in Jain religious geography.

7. Religious Tradition and History

An important historical principle again comes to the fore here. The antiquity of a religious tradition cannot be studied merely on the basis of how widespread that tradition is today.

For this, one examines – what is the oldest available literature of the tradition; to what period do its various texts belong; what do ancient inscriptions say; what is the archaeological evidence; and how did evidence of that tradition develop in different periods.

This method preserves both respect for religious faith and the scientific limits of history.

8. Ayodhya – A City of Many Religious Memories

In the tradition of the Ramayana, Ayodhya is the city of Shri Ram. In Jain tradition, it is the birthplace of the Tirthankaras. In Buddhist literature, it appears as a region connected with Buddhist activities and religious institutions.

The existence of these three traditions makes the cultural history of Ayodhya broader. There is no need to view them as evidence contradicting one another. A single city can be the centre of many religious traditions in different periods.

9. Were the Religious Traditions Competing with One Another?

Examples of both competition and cooperation are found among various religious traditions in history.

But it would not be historically proper to assume, for every period of Ayodhya, that all traditions were always in conflict. Similarly, it would also not be correct to assume that all traditions were always in complete peaceful coexistence.

A conclusion should be drawn only on the basis of the evidence available for any particular period.

10. The Historical Importance of Jain Literature

Jain literature is important in the study of the religious geography and cultural memory of Ayodhya. These texts contain the narratives of the Tirthankaras, dynastic traditions, pilgrimage sites, and religious accounts.

These help us understand how the Jain community remembered Ayodhya, and how they determined its place in their religious geography.

But literary tradition and archaeological date should not be regarded as one and the same thing.

11. The Important Indication from Buddhist-Jain Sources

The study of Buddhist and Jain traditions makes an important point clear regarding the history of Ayodhya – Ayodhya was not merely the memory of a political capital; it was also part of a religious and cultural network.

The ascetics, travellers, scholars, and pilgrims who came and went here carried various religious ideas from one place to another. In this way, the history of Ayodhya becomes connected with the dynamic history of the broader Indian civilization.

12. A Comparative Study of Sources

If we view the various sources of Ayodhya together, an interesting picture comes to the fore. The following table is not intended to prove one tradition greater or lesser than another, but to understand the multi-layered historical memory of Ayodhya.

Comparative Table

Tradition: the Ramayana tradition – Principal identity of Ayodhya: the royal city of Shri Ram.

Tradition: Vaishnav tradition – Principal identity of Ayodhya: the birthplace of Shri Ram and a principal pilgrimage site.

Tradition: Buddhist tradition – Principal identity of Ayodhya: a region connected with Buddhist religious activities.

Tradition: Jain tradition – Principal identity of Ayodhya: the birthplace of many Tirthankaras.

Tradition: archaeology – Principal identity of Ayodhya: material cultural layers of various periods.

Tradition: travel accounts – Principal identity of Ayodhya: the accounts of outside observers of various periods.

13. Caution in Research

One thing will be kept continuously in mind in this chapter – respect for religious tradition, and the scientific examination of historical evidence, can proceed together.

A tradition cannot be rejected merely because it is religious. But declaring a religious tradition a definite historical event, without independent evidence, would also not accord with research method.

Studying Ayodhya with precisely this balance will remain the fundamental method of this book.

Conclusion of Part 3

Buddhist and Jain literature bring forward important layers of the history of Ayodhya.

Buddhist sources preserve the memory of Buddhist religious activities and institutions in the Ayodhya-Saketa region, while Jain tradition remembers Ayodhya as the birthplace of many Tirthankaras.

The study of these traditions shows that the cultural history of Ayodhya has been multidimensional.

At the same time, it also becomes clear that religious memory, literary evidence, and archaeological evidence are different in nature.

A balanced historiography accepts all these respectfully, but keeps their evidentiary value distinct.

In the Part that follows, we shall understand the ancient political identity of Ayodhya – Kosala, the Ikshvaku tradition, and various dynasties – on the basis of literary and historical sources.

Chapter 14

Vaishnav Bairagis and Ayodhya

From Hanumangarhi (1855) to the Ramjanmabhoomi Verdict (2019)

Part 1: The Rise of Vaishnav Bairagis in Ayodhya and the Tradition of Hanumangarhi

The moment we speak the name Ayodhya, before us appears the birthplace of Lord Sri Ram, the sacred bank of the Sarayu, the Ramkatha, and a long tradition of temples, saints, and sadhu sects. But behind this religious character of Ayodhya lie many saintly traditions that worked for centuries, among which the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition holds a place of particular importance.

The Vaishnav Bairagis were never a single, uniform organisation. Many branches of Vaishnav ascetic traditions developed in North India. The Ramanandi tradition was extremely influential among them, and Ayodhya became one of its principal centres. The saints and monasteries connected with this tradition carried forward many activities – devotion, sadhana, temple service, service to pilgrims, communal feeding, religious education, and monastic administration.

Editorial note: A detailed account of the structure of the Vaishnav Bairagi akharas (Nirmohi, Nirvani, Digambar, and others), the traditional list of the "seven akharas," and the religious character of Hanumangarhi has already been given in Chapter 14. The focus of this Chapter 15 is the judicial journey of these very institutions — from 1855 to 2019 — so, to avoid repetition, only the material directly connected with that judicial journey is included here.

1. Ayodhya and the Vaishnav Sadhu Tradition

Ayodhya's religious significance is ancient, but in the medieval and later periods many monasteries and sadhu sects expanded here. In particular, the stream of Ram-bhakti established Ayodhya as one of North India's foremost Vaishnav pilgrimage centres. Sadhus came from far and wide, practised sadhana on the banks of the Sarayu, chanted the name of Ram, recited the Ramkatha, and carried the tradition of devotion forward through their disciples. Gradually, permanent monasteries and religious institutions developed alongside these activities.

2. The Meaning of "Bairagi"

The word "Bairagi" is fundamentally connected with vairagya — renunciation of worldly attachment, making devotion to God and sadhana the chief purpose of life. But historically the word was not used solely for renunciate ascetics; in many places it is also

found applied to Vaishnav householders, temple servants, and religious communities. Wherever the word "Bairagi" appears in a historical document, therefore, its local and period-specific context must be examined.

3. The Ramanandi Tradition and Ayodhya

In the Vaishnav history of Ayodhya, the Ramanandi tradition holds a special place. This tradition made Lord Sri Ram the central object of devotion — Ram-naam, Ramkatha, Ram-bhakti, vairagya, the guru-disciple relationship, and the sadhu-sangha together deepened Ayodhya's religious atmosphere.

4. The Development of Monasteries

Monasteries became places where sadhus resided, disciples received instruction, religious texts were studied, pilgrims received shelter and food, and religious traditions were carried forward to later generations. In this way monasteries did not remain mere buildings — they became living religious institutions.

5. Hanumangarhi: A Principal Centre of the Vaishnav Tradition

Hanumangarhi is a major site dedicated to Lord Hanuman and has long been an important centre of religious life connected with the Vaishnav sadhu tradition. Its present form, and the history of its development, has passed through several periods, so it would

not be right to attribute its history to a single event or a single person.

6. The Nawabs of Awadh and Religious Institutions

During the rule of Awadh, administrative and economic relationships developed between the state and many of Ayodhya's religious institutions. Historical sources mention documents relating to land grants, protection, or other arrangements for religious institutions, but each claim of a land grant or a traditional entitlement needs to be verified separately from the relevant documents.

7. Bairagi Sadhus and Religious Property

As monasteries and temples developed, they also came to hold land and other resources, used for the sadhus' upkeep, temple service, communal feeding, and religious activities. Religious institutions thus began to form part of the local economy and the pilgrimage system.

8. Service to Pilgrims

A devotee coming to Ayodhya would often stay for several days. In such circumstances, dharamshalas, monasteries, and sadhu institutions were important for pilgrims – services such as food, lodging, prasad, katha (religious discourse), and religious guidance strengthened the pilgrimage system of Ayodhya.

9. From Saint to Institution

A saint first practises sadhana alone; then disciples gather; gradually a tradition forms; and, over time, that tradition may take the shape of a monastery or religious institution. The history of many of Ayodhya's monasteries can be understood in the context of this broad guru-disciple tradition.

10. 1855: A Decisive Turning Point in History

By the mid-nineteenth century, various kinds of claims and disputes existed among different religious communities and institutions in Ayodhya. The 1855 Hanumangarhi conflict is an important episode within this broader historical situation. Available sources differ in their accounts of the event, so it would not be right to accept any one side's narrative as final history without examination. It is the historian's task to understand the event, examine the sources, and draw conclusions according to the evidence.

11. The Hanumangarhi Dispute and the Bairagis

In the 1855 event, tension rose over religious rights at Hanumangarhi and related claims. The active role of Bairagi sadhus in this conflict is recorded in historical sources. But to present this event, in today's social context, as a charge-sheet against any community would not be appropriate from a historical

standpoint – it was a specific historical circumstance of the nineteenth century.

12. The Administrative Role after the Conflict

After 1855, the greatest challenge before the administration was to maintain religious peace in Ayodhya, manage religious sites, handle the claims of various communities, and protect public order. From this point the importance of administrative intervention in Ayodhya's religious disputes steadily grew.

13. From 1855 to 1885

After the 1855 event, disputes gradually took a new form. The question was no longer merely one of religious power – who has the right, who has the right to worship, who may be permitted to build, which institution holds the sevayat (service) right. These questions eventually reached the doors of the courts.

14. Moving toward 1885

The suit filed by Mahant Raghubar Das in 1885 became an important milestone in this history – one of the early links in the judicial process that followed.

15. From Devotion to Rights – A Transformation

It would be incomplete to confine the role of Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagis to "religious conflict" alone. Their history appears at many

levels — in devotion, in temple service, in monastic administration, in service to pilgrims, in saintly literature, and, in later periods, in judicial process. This is the core subject of this chapter.

16. Viewing History through Evidence

Our purpose in this chapter is not to generate sentiment against any community. We wish to understand when and how the Vaishnav Bairagis became influential in Ayodhya, how the religious importance of Hanumangarhi grew, what happened in 1855, why Mahant Raghubar Das went to court in 1885, what role the Nirmohi Akhara played, and, ultimately, what judicial process led to the Supreme Court's 2019 verdict. The answers to all these questions must be sought in documents and evidence.

17. The Most Important Lesson of This History

Religious faith and historical evidence each have their own place. Faith may be sacred to an individual, but when writing history we must examine sources, and when a court delivers judgment it does so on the basis of available evidence and law. The Supreme Court's 2019 verdict was the outcome of this long judicial process; the official judgment examined in detail the preceding suits and the long judicial history.

18. The Journey Ahead

This story, beginning in 1855, reaches 1885. From 1885 onward comes the court, then the Nirmohi Akhara, then the cases of independent India, and finally 9 November 2019. Chapter 15, therefore, will not be merely a history of the Vaishnav Bairagis — it will be a study of a long historical journey from devotion to the courtroom.

Conclusion

Without understanding the tradition of the Vaishnav Bairagis, an important part of Ayodhya's religious history remains incomplete. Their role encompassed devotion, sadhana, monastic administration, temple service, and service to pilgrims, along with — in certain historical circumstances — presenting their case before the administration and the courts for the protection of religious institutions and rights. But rather than turning history into a tale of glory or a weapon of dispute, we must read it with evidence, context, and balance. 1855 is not merely the date of a conflict, and 1885 is not merely the date of a lawsuit — both are links in the long history of Ayodhya that ultimately reached the Supreme Court's verdict of 2019.

Part 2: Ayodhya after 1855 and the Historic Lawsuit of 1885

Mahant Raghubar Das, Ram Chabutra, and the Courts' First Major Knock

After the 1855 Hanumangarhi conflict, Ayodhya's history entered a phase in which questions relating to religious sites gradually began to come before the administrative and judicial system. If 1855 is viewed in the context of religious conflict, then 1885 may be regarded as a different and highly important milestone within that same long history — the question now was who has the right to worship, who may be permitted to build, which institution holds religious authority, and on what basis these questions would be decided.

1. Who was Mahant Raghubar Das?

At the centre of the 1885 case stands the name of Mahant Raghubar Das. He was a religious mahant connected with Ayodhya's Vaishnav sadhu tradition, and available judicial records list him as the plaintiff in that suit. His 1885 case was not of the same character as the 2019 dispute — his immediate demand concerned permission to construct a temple on the Ram Chabutra.

2. The 1885 Suit

According to available judicial records, Mahant Raghubar Das filed a suit before the Faizabad court in January 1885. This case is generally cited as Mahant Raghubar Das v. Secretary of State for India, and the original suit is referred to in judicial records as Original Suit No. 61/280 of 1885.

3. What Was the Suit's Main Demand?

In 1885, Mahant Raghubar Das's principal demand concerned permission to build a temple on the Ram Chabutra. In other words, the immediate question before the court was whether permission to construct a temple should be granted at the site known as the Ram Chabutra.

4. What Was Ram Chabutra?

The Ram Chabutra was described in judicial records as a religious site situated in the outer part of the disputed complex, as it then stood. The Hindu side worshipped there, and the Ram Chabutra was regarded as a sacred site associated with Lord Sri Ram.

5. Difficult Questions before the Court

The court had to consider whether permission for construction could be granted, whether it would affect public peace, and what kind of relief the court could provide under the circumstances. Given the conditions of the time, the court refused permission for construction.

6. The First 1885 Judgment

The then Sub-Judge of Faizabad did not accept Mahant Raghubar Das's claim. Concern for public order and for preventing the

dispute from escalating was the principal consideration behind the judgment.

7. The Right of Appeal

Mahant Raghubar Das did not accept the lower court's decision as final and appealed to a higher judicial forum. The matter proceeded further as Civil Appeal No. 27 of 1885, and thereafter as Second Appeal No. 27 of 1886 before the Judicial Commissioner, Oudh.

8. The 1886 Judicial Stage

Before the Judicial Commissioner, Oudh, Mahant Raghubar Das again did not obtain the relief he sought. However, this had great historical significance in another respect – Ayodhya's religious claims had now become part of formal judicial records.

9. Did the 1885 Court Decide the Ownership of the Ramjanmabhoomi?

No. The 1885 case was chiefly concerned with permission to build a temple on the Ram Chabutra. It would not be historically accurate to regard it as the final determination of ownership of the entire disputed land. It was ultimately in 2019 that the Supreme Court decided the broader dispute.

10. The Significance of the Nirmohi Akhara

The Nirmohi Akhara has consistently regarded itself as the holder of rights connected with religious service and the arrangement of worship relating to the Ramjanmabhoomi. In the later judicial history, the Akhara put forward claims relating to sevayat rights and management.

11. The Meaning of Sevayat

A person or institution serving a temple is not merely a priest. In many religious traditions a sevayat may hold specific rights and duties connected with the temple's worship, management, and religious property. This is why the question of who should be regarded as sevayat, what that person's rights are, and whether a sevayat's right is equivalent to ownership of the land, became important.

12. Religious Right and Land Ownership

The right to worship and ownership of land are not always the same thing. A person or institution may hold the right to worship or to serve at a religious site without this, by itself, proving legal ownership of the entire land.

13. 1855 to 1885: A Thirty-Year Journey

During this period, the character of relations among religious sites, the administration, and communities in Ayodhya continued to change. The 1855 conflict was an example of violent

confrontation; the 1885 suit became an example, within the same historical background, of adopting a judicial remedy – from conflict toward the courtroom.

14. Did the Bairagis Adopt the Path of the Courts?

Mahant Raghubar Das placed his religious demand before the court; he did not take up arms against the administration. He resorted to judicial process, appealed, and went up to the highest judicial level available – using the judicial path for religious rights.

15. The Limits of Law Also Existed

Mahant Raghubar Das's demand was not accepted. In history, a party's claim being rejected does not prove that its religious faith came to an end – religious tradition continued even afterward.

16. Why Is the 1885 Suit Important?

First, a religious claim relating to Ayodhya entered the formal judicial record. Second, the names of Mahant Raghubar Das and the Ram Chabutra became part of judicial history. Third, the question of balance between religious right and public order came to the fore. Fourth, a historical background was prepared for the judicial processes that followed.

17. An Important Caution

For accurate history, this distinction must be understood – the 1885 suit concerned permission to build a temple on the Ram Chabutra; to describe it as the first suit over the entire Ramjanmabhoomi would be a historical exaggeration. In later suits, the claims and questions widened.

18. The Importance of Judicial Records

By reading the plaint, the judgment, the appeal, witness statements, documents, and the judges' observations, we can understand what claim was actually made at that time.

19. History and Memory

An event of one generation becomes a story in the next generation; the story in turn becomes tradition; but the historian must always ask – what do the original documents say?

20. A Second Image of the Vaishnav Bairagis

The 1885 episode shows a religious mahant as plaintiff in court, participating in legal process, and going up to a higher judicial forum through appeal – so it would be incomplete to view Vaishnav Bairagi history only through the lens of arms or conflict.

21. Devotion, Service, and Rights

Worshipping in a temple is devotion; serving pilgrims is service; and adopting legal process to protect recognised rights connected with a religious site is a matter of rights.

22. What Happened after 1886?

The dispute did not end after the 1886 judicial stage. The twentieth century arrived, the independence movement unfolded, India became independent, and new cases relating to Ayodhya arose in independent India — among these, the Nirmohi Akhara's 1959 suit is also significant.

23. 1959: A New Judicial Chapter

In 1959, the Nirmohi Akhara approached the court. This claim was different in character from the 1885 demand — the main questions now concerned management and sevayat rights. The 1885 question was permission for temple construction; the principal 1959 question was the right of religious service and management; and, later still, the broader dispute over land and title.

24. The Long Chain of History

1855 — the conflict connected with Hanumangarhi. 1885 — Mahant Raghubar Das's suit. 1886 — the appellate stage at the higher judicial level. 1959 — the Nirmohi Akhara's suit. After the 1980s — the dispute's broader public and political dimension. 2010 — the

Allahabad High Court's judgment. 2019 – the Supreme Court's final verdict.

25. History Changes Direction

In 1855, the question was the protection of a religious site; in 1885, the question of religious construction; in 1959, the question of sevayat rights and management; and in 2019 the Supreme Court had to give the final judicial resolution of the broader land dispute – in nearly a century and a half, a religious dispute took on administrative, judicial, and constitutional form.

26. Our Research Method

We will examine what each document states, what each court said, what claim each party made, which claim the court accepted and which it did not – this is the correct method of evidence-based history.

Conclusion

The 1885 Mahant Raghubar Das suit is an extremely important milestone in the history of Ayodhya. This case showed that disputes relating to religious rights were no longer confined to local conflict or administrative arrangement – they had reached the threshold of the courts. Mahant Raghubar Das did not immediately receive the permission he sought, but his suit was recorded in history – and that is its greatest historical significance.

The journey from the 1855 conflict to the 1885 court was Ayodhya's journey from conflict toward judicial process. And the next important link in that journey is the 1959 Nirmohi Akhara suit.

Part 3: The Nirmohi Akhara, from 1959 to the Ramlala Suit of 1989

Sevayat Rights, Worship Arrangements, and a New Chapter of Judicial Struggle

The 1885 Mahant Raghubar Das case was an important judicial milestone in Ayodhya's history. But the story did not end with that suit. After the building of independent India, the same question arose again in a new constitutional and judicial environment. It was in this changing India that the Nirmohi Akhara took an important judicial step in 1959.

1. 1959: The Nirmohi Akhara Reaches Court

In 1959, the Nirmohi Akhara filed a civil suit before the Faizabad court. This case was different from the 1885 Mahant Raghubar Das case — in 1885 the main demand concerned permission to build a temple on the Ram Chabutra, whereas in 1959 the Nirmohi Akhara's claim concerned chiefly sevayat rights and management of the place of worship. This marked the beginning of a new judicial chapter in the Ayodhya dispute.

2. The Nirmohi Akhara's Claim

The Nirmohi Akhara described itself as the sevayat and manager of the religious site. Its claim rested on the ground that it had long been engaged in religious service and worship arrangements there. Here again the important distinction reappears — the sevayat right and the final ownership of land are not the same legal question.

3. Why Were Sevayat Rights Important?

In the Indian temple tradition, a temple is not merely a building — worship, aarti, offerings, festivals, religious property, temple management, priests, attendants, and the arrangements for devotees are all bound up with it. The Nirmohi Akhara's 1959 suit should be understood in this broader context.

4. The 1959 Suit and the Limitation Period

A court must also examine when a suit was filed and on what legal ground the claim rests. Later, the Supreme Court too, in considering the Nirmohi Akhara's claim, regarded the question of limitation — that is, the prescribed legal time-limit — as significant. This is why the 2019 verdict was not merely a review of religious history but also a detailed legal examination.

5. The State of Worship in Ayodhya

Even in independent India, Ayodhya remained a principal centre of religious activity. During this period, judicial questions concerning worship rights, management, and religious claims relating to the disputed site continued.

6. The Event of 1949

In Ayodhya's judicial history, the event of December 1949 is an important turning point. After idols of Ramlala appeared inside the disputed structure, the administration took action and the site was attached in order to control the situation. Thereafter, questions relating to worship and management of the site became more complex.

7. The State of Worship and the Courts

After 1949, arrangements for worship at the site remained subject to judicial and administrative orders. This gave rise to the questions – who has the right to worship, who has the right to management, and who holds ultimate right over the disputed property?

8. The Changing Environment of the 1980s

By the 1980s, the Ayodhya dispute had become considerably broader than before. It is not the purpose of this chapter to give a detailed account of political events – our focus remains the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition and judicial history.

9. 1986: The Order to Unlock the Site

In 1986, following an order of the Faizabad district court, the locks on the disputed site were opened. This brought about an important change in the position regarding worship and darshan for devotees.

10. The Nirmohi Akhara's Role

Throughout this period, the Nirmohi Akhara remained active regarding its religious and sevayat position. By now other claimants had also appeared in the dispute, so Ayodhya's judicial dispute increasingly became a multi-party case.

11. 1989: A Decisive New Suit

The year 1989 is an extremely important year in the judicial history of Ayodhya. In this year, a new suit was filed presenting Bhagwan Ramlala Virajman and the Ramjanmabhoomi as plaintiffs, brought by Devki Nandan Agarwal as their "next friend."

12. The Legal Question of "Ramlala Virajman"

Under Indian law, certain religious institutions and deities may be granted juristic personality. In the 1989 suit, Bhagwan Ramlala Virajman was presented in this manner as a juristic entity, under the special principles of Indian religious trust and property law. This question also remained important in the Supreme Court's 2019 judgment.

13. The Ramjanmabhoomi Was Also Made a Party

In the 1989 suit, the Ramjanmabhoomi itself was also presented as a plaintiff. Now the question was no longer merely who would perform service, but also who held the right to the disputed land.

14. Nirmohi Akhara versus the Ramlala Suit

The Nirmohi Akhara's claim was chiefly one of sevayat and management rights, while Ramlala Virajman's claim was to broader rights over the Ramjanmabhoomi and the related land. The two claims were different in nature, so in 2019 the Supreme Court had to examine each party's claim on its own separate legal basis.

15. Did the 1989 Suit Directly Become the 2019 Verdict?

No. Even after 1989, the judicial process continued for a long time – there was extensive hearing before the Allahabad High Court, historical documents were examined, archaeological evidence was considered, revenue records were reviewed, and the case eventually reached the Supreme Court.

16. 2010: The Allahabad High Court

On 30 September 2010, the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court delivered its judgment on the Ayodhya land dispute, providing an arrangement regarding different portions of the

disputed land. But this judgment was not final – various parties went on to the Supreme Court.

17. The Final Stage at the Supreme Court

The hearing of the Ayodhya dispute was conducted by a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. Before the court came the legal right to the land, ownership, possession, worship, historical use, evidence, and prior judicial records – all were examined.

18. Significance from the Perspective of Vaishnav Bairagi History

Throughout this long judicial journey, the role of the Nirmohi Akhara is especially significant, because it was a leading religious institution connected with Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagi tradition that asserted its religious and sevayat rights before the courts.

19. But What Happened in 2019?

On 9 November 2019, the Supreme Court delivered its historic judgment. The court ruled in favour of Ramlala Virajman regarding the disputed land and directed the Central Government to constitute a trust for temple construction. A direction was given for five acres of alternative land to be given to the Muslim side in Ayodhya. The judgment was delivered unanimously.

20. What Became of the Nirmohi Akhara's Claim?

The Supreme Court examined the Nirmohi Akhara's historical claim in detail, but did not grant the Akhara final ownership of the disputed land. Its sevayat claim was also not accepted by the court, chiefly on grounds of the legal limitation period. Nevertheless, the court directed the Central Government to consider giving the Nirmohi Akhara appropriate representation while constituting the trust.

21. The Difference between History and the Courts

An institution's role in history and the grant of land ownership by a court are two different matters. The Nirmohi Akhara is an important institution in Ayodhya's religious tradition and judicial history, but the 2019 verdict was concerned with the legal question of land rights.

22. From 1855 to 2019

1855 – the Hanumangarhi conflict. 1885 – Mahant Raghubar Das's suit. 1886 – the appellate judicial stage. 1949 – the placing of the Ramlala idols. 1959 – the Nirmohi Akhara's suit. 1986 – the order to unlock the site. 1989 – the Ramlala Virajman suit. 2010 – the Allahabad High Court judgment. 2019 – the Supreme Court's historic verdict. This is a judicial and religious journey of roughly 164 years.

23. Where Is the Role of the Vaishnav Bairagis Visible?

In temple service, in monastic administration, in pilgrim service, in the preservation of religious traditions, in the institutional role of the mahants, and in the assertion of religious rights before the courts – so it would be incomplete to view the role of the Vaishnav Bairagis only through the lens of conflict.

24. The Greatest Historical Lesson

1855 showed conflict; 1885 showed the path of the courts; 1959 raised the question of sevayat rights; 1989 brought the dispute to the wider question of land rights; and 2019 delivered the final judicial verdict through the Supreme Court – from religious tradition to administration, from administration to the courts, from the courts to the High Court, and finally to the Supreme Court.

25. The Most Important Point for the Researcher

Which claim was made at which time, what evidence supported that claim, on what basis the court accepted or rejected it, and what the Supreme Court finally said in 2019 – this is the method of evidence-based history.

Conclusion

The 1959 Nirmohi Akhara suit was an important link in the history of Ayodhya. It shows that a leading institution of the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition placed its claims to religious service and management before the courts. The 1989 Ramlala Virajman suit

carried the dispute into a new legal dimension. Over the three decades that followed, the judicial process eventually reached the historic 2019 Supreme Court verdict. But in understanding this whole journey, we must always remember one thing – faith has its own place, history has its own evidence, and law has its own principles. And the real story of Ayodhya is to be found in the long dialogue among these three.

Part 4: From 1989 to 2010 – Ramlala Virajman, Archaeological Evidence, and the Allahabad High Court

In the previous part we saw that in 1959 the Nirmohi Akhara approached the court over its sevayat and management rights, and that in 1989 a new and important suit appeared in the name of Ramlala Virajman. Ayodhya's judicial history now enters a phase in which, alongside religious claims, historical documents, revenue records, archaeological evidence, and long-standing religious use also became part of judicial examination. This phase eventually reached the important 2010 judgment of the Allahabad High Court.

1. The New Judicial Chapter of 1989

In 1989, a suit was filed in the name of Ramlala Virajman and the Ramjanmabhoomi. This suit gave the dispute a broader legal form – the question now also became which party's legal right was established over the disputed property.

2. The Role of Devki Nandan Agarwal

The suit on behalf of Ramlala Virajman was presented by Devki Nandan Agarwal as "next friend," in keeping with the tradition of Indian law under which, when a deity is held to have juristic personality, a suitable person may conduct proceedings on the deity's behalf before a court.

3. Several Claims Together

Over time, several parties reached the courts in the Ayodhya dispute – the Nirmohi Akhara, the Sunni Central Waqf Board, Ramlala Virajman, and other related parties. Each party's claim and legal basis were different.

4. The 1990s: The Widening of the Dispute

In the 1990s, the Ayodhya dispute became an extremely important national issue. But the judicial process proceeded on its own separate track – the core question remained in whose favour the legal right over the disputed property would be established.

5. The Event of 1992

On 6 December 1992, the disputed structure was demolished – an extremely important and sensitive event in Indian history. After this, the underlying judicial dispute over land and religious rights continued to move forward in its own process.

6. The Court's Approach

A historical event and a legal right are not the same thing — the religious significance of a place is one question, legal ownership of a property is a separate question, and a party's act of worship there may be yet another distinct legal question.

7. The Role of Historical Documents

Before the court were placed old administrative records, revenue documents, travellers' accounts, gazetteers, earlier judicial decisions, religious literature, and other historical material, so as to examine how the disputed site had been used in different periods.

8. Travellers' Accounts

The accounts of some travellers and European observers who visited Ayodhya also became part of the judicial debate. But no traveller's account is, by itself, final proof — its date, context, language, and purpose must also be examined.

9. Turning to Archaeology

The question arose — did archaeological remains of an earlier structure exist beneath the disputed site? This question in turn made the role of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) important.

10. The ASI Excavation

Following the direction of the Allahabad High Court, the Archaeological Survey of India carried out a scientific archaeological investigation and excavation at the disputed site. This work took place in 2003. During the excavation, a report was presented describing remains and structural material from various periods.

11. What Did the ASI Report Contain?

The ASI report discussed structural remains connected with a large, older construction beneath the site, including the mention of features such as pillar bases. According to the report, the underlying construction predated the disputed structure, but there were differences among the various parties over the interpretation of this evidence.

12. Did the ASI State with Certainty That It Was a Temple?

Great care is needed here. The ASI report spoke of remains of a large, older construction, but there were differences among the parties over the interpretation of that report. It is more accurate to state that the archaeological evidence pointed toward the existence of a prior structure beneath the disputed site, but the nature of that structure, and the conclusions drawn from it, remained disputed.

13. The 2010 Allahabad High Court

After a judicial process lasting more than two decades, on 30 September 2010 the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court delivered its judgment. A bench of three judges gave separate opinions.

14. The Bench of Three Judges

The 2010 bench comprised Justice Dharam Veer Sharma, Justice Sudhir Agarwal, and Justice S. U. Khan. All three delivered their own opinions, so it would not be correct to read the 2010 judgment as reflecting a single viewpoint.

15. The Division of the Disputed Land

Under the 2010 judgment, the disputed land was divided into three parts — one part for Ramlala Virajman, one part for the Nirmohi Akhara, and one part for the Sunni Central Waqf Board. This judgment did not become an immediate final resolution, since all parties went on to the Supreme Court.

16. The Significance of 2010 for the Nirmohi Akhara

In the 2010 judgment, the Nirmohi Akhara's historical role was placed before the court, but the Akhara's claim was not based on religious sentiment alone — its principal claim concerned sevayat and management rights, which later also became a subject of discussion before the Supreme Court.

17. The Significance of Ramlala's Claim

In the 2010 judgment, Ramlala Virajman's claim was also given significant weight, resting on principles of religious juristic personality and rights relating to the birthplace.

18. Was the 2010 Judgment Final?

No. The 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment was not the final decision. Appeals against it were filed before the Supreme Court.

19. The Journey Toward the Supreme Court

Was the 2010 division of land legally proper? Which party's right to the disputed property was stronger? What evidence existed of historical use and worship? What was the significance of the archaeological evidence? The case reached the Supreme Court with all these questions.

20. The 2019 Verdict Came against This Background

The five-judge Constitution Bench conducted a detailed examination of the entire dispute, including historical documents, revenue records, archaeological reports, travellers' accounts, prior judicial decisions, and oral and documentary evidence.

21. Why Is This Phase Important from the Vaishnav Bairagi Perspective?

Between 1989 and 2010, the Nirmohi Akhara, connected with the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition, remained a principal party to the judicial process – this does not mean the Akhara received final ownership in 2010, but it does mean that the historical role of Ayodhya's Vaishnav religious institutions remained continuously present in the judicial record.

22. History versus Judgment

History tells us how long a particular religious tradition has existed in Ayodhya; law tells us which party's legal right over the property has been established. There may be a relationship between the two, but they are not the same question.

23. The Question beyond 2010

After the 2010 judgment, the Ayodhya dispute reached its final judicial phase. After lengthy hearings, in 2019 the five-member Constitution Bench delivered a unanimous verdict.

24. The Journey from 1855 to 2010

1855 – the Hanumangarhi conflict. 1885 – Mahant Raghubar Das's suit. 1886 – the judicial appeal. 1949 – the placing of the Ramlala idols. 1959 – the Nirmohi Akhara's suit on sevayat/management rights. 1986 – the order to unlock the site. 1989 – the Ramlala Virajman suit. 1992 – the demolition of the disputed structure. 2003 – the ASI archaeological investigation.

2010 – the Allahabad High Court judgment. The next milestone – 2019, the Supreme Court of India.

25. The Researcher's Observation

Not exaggerating any event – where the evidence is strong, the facts should be stated clearly; where historians disagree, the disagreement should be noted; and where a court has given a final decision, the court's actual conclusion should be presented as it is.

Conclusion

The period from 1989 to 2010 was extremely decisive in the history of Ayodhya. During this time, the dispute moved from local religious claims to a national judicial question. Historical documents were examined, archaeological evidence was tested, revenue records were reviewed, the continuity of religious use and worship was debated, the Nirmohi Akhara's sevayat claim was considered, the juristic personality of Ramlala Virajman was examined, and finally, in 2010, the Allahabad High Court delivered its judgment. But the story was not yet over, because the final judgment still had to be given by the Supreme Court of India.

Part 5: 2019 – The Supreme Court's Historic Verdict

Evidence, Faith, Law, and the Ramjanmabhoomi

In the previous four parts we traced the long journey of Ayodhya, beginning with the 1855 Hanumangarhi conflict and passing through the 1885 Mahant Raghubar Das suit, the 1959 Nirmohi Akhara suit, the 1989 Ramlala Virajman suit, the 2003 archaeological investigation, and the 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment. We now reach the historic milestone at which the Supreme Court of India delivered its verdict on this long land dispute — on 9 November 2019.

1. The Case before the Supreme Court

The Ayodhya dispute reached the Supreme Court through numerous appeals. The principal case was titled M. Siddiq (D) through LRs v. Mahant Suresh Das & Others. The Supreme Court's records list the main appeals as Civil Appeal Nos. 10866-10867 of 2010. The verdict was delivered on 9 November 2019, following a hearing before a five-judge Constitution Bench.

2. The Five-Judge Constitution Bench

The bench comprised Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, Justice S. A. Bobde, Justice D. Y. Chandrachud, Justice Ashok Bhushan, and Justice S. Abdul Nazeer. All five judges delivered a unanimous verdict.

3. A Hearing of 41 Days

The judgment noted that the Constitution Bench heard the case over 41 days. A vast quantity of oral and documentary evidence had already been presented before the Allahabad High Court — the combined length of the High Court's three judgments was stated to be roughly 4,304 pages. This makes clear that the 2019 verdict was not a conclusion arrived at suddenly.

4. What Evidence Did the Supreme Court Examine?

Historical documents, revenue records, administrative records, travellers' accounts, archaeological material, the ASI report, prior judicial decisions, oral evidence, and material relating to religious use and worship. This was a judicial determination of a civil title dispute, not a decision based only on religious texts.

5. Faith and Legal Right

The court did not entirely set aside the Hindu side's religious faith, but it did not determine land ownership on the basis of faith alone. The court evaluated the various pieces of evidence and examined how each party had substantiated its claims.

6. Ramlala Virajman's Claim

Under Indian law, within Hindu religious law, a deity may in certain circumstances acquire juristic personality. The Supreme Court also considered this legal principle.

7. The Question of the Birthplace

The Supreme Court held that the Hindu community's religious belief that the disputed site is indeed the birthplace of Lord Sri Ram had long existed. But the court did not determine land rights on the basis of religious belief alone – it also examined worship, religious use, historical records, and other evidence.

8. The Outer and Inner Courtyards

In the outer courtyard, evidence of Hindu religious activity and worship appeared more clearly – evidence of worship traditions connected with sites such as the Ram Chabutra and Sita Rasoi remained significant in the judicial record. Regarding the inner courtyard, the claims and questions of use of both communities were also examined.

9. Examination of the Muslim Side's Claims

The Supreme Court also heard the Muslim side's claims in detail. The Muslim side presented evidence relating to the Babri Masjid and its use, and the court carried out a comparative examination of all the available evidence.

10. The Court's View on the Events of 1949 and 1992

The Supreme Court held both the 1949 placing of the idols and the 1992 demolition of the disputed structure to be against the rule of law. In deciding the final land dispute, the court did not treat unlawful acts as a basis of legal entitlement.

11. The Significance of the ASI Report

The Supreme Court examined the ASI's findings. The report mentioned remains of an older, large construction beneath the disputed structure. Here again caution is necessary – it would not be scholarly language to describe the ASI report simply as "the sole proof that a temple existed." The correct approach is that the court read the archaeological evidence together with other historical and judicial evidence.

12. Did the Court Say the Mosque Was Not Built on Vacant Land?

The Supreme Court accepted, on the basis of the ASI report, the conclusion that there was an older structure beneath the disputed structure and that this structure was not Islamic. But the court was also careful to note that the available archaeological material could not establish with certainty that this structure was itself a Ram temple, or that it had been built specifically as a Ramjanmabhoomi temple. This distinction is very important.

13. The Nirmohi Akhara's Claim

The Nirmohi Akhara had long described itself as the sevayat of the religious site connected with the Ramjanmabhoomi. The Supreme Court examined this claim in detail, but did not regard the Nirmohi Akhara's suit as maintainable on the ground of

limitation – the prescribed legal time-limit. The Akhara therefore did not receive ownership of the disputed land.

14. Does This Mean the Nirmohi Akhara's History Ends?

Certainly not. The court's not granting ownership of the land does not mean the Nirmohi Akhara made no contribution to Ayodhya's religious history. The Akhara remained an important institution of Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagi tradition.

15. The Supreme Court's Final Decision on the Land

The Supreme Court ordered that the disputed land be given in favour of Ramlala Virajman. It also directed the Central Government to constitute a trust to oversee arrangements relating to temple construction.

16. Five Acres of Land for the Muslim Side

The Supreme Court also directed that five acres of suitable land in Ayodhya be given to the Sunni Waqf Board. This direction was given under the court's power to do complete justice, under Article 142 of the Constitution.

17. The Verdict's Most Important Feature

The 2019 verdict was not a political decision declaring one religious community victorious over another. It was a judicial

resolution of a legal land dispute, framed on the basis of the Constitution, the law, and the available evidence.

18. The Significance of 2019 for Vaishnav Bairagi History

The historical role of the Vaishnav Bairagi institutions was an important part of Ayodhya's judicial journey, while the final decision on the land was given by the Supreme Court on the basis of all the available evidence and the law. To describe the 2019 verdict merely as a victory of the Bairagis would also diminish the true nature of the court's decision.

19. The Historian's Responsibility

Presenting history only as conflict, and concealing the conflicts within history entirely – both extremes are mistaken. What happened in history should be written with evidence, and wherever sources disagree, that disagreement too should be presented honestly.

20. 1855 to 2019: A Long Journey

1855 – the Hanumangarhi conflict. 1885 – Mahant Raghubar Das's suit. 1959 – the Nirmohi Akhara's suit. 1989 – the Ramlala Virajman suit. 1992 – the demolition of the disputed structure. 2003 – the ASI archaeological investigation. 2010 – the Allahabad High Court judgment. 2019 – the Supreme Court's unanimous

verdict. This is the story of a long dialogue among religion, society, administration, justice, and the Constitution.

21. The Conclusion of Our Research Journey

To understand Ayodhya, one must take together its ancient literature, the Puranas, the Ramayana tradition, its pilgrim sites, its ghats, its monasteries, its akharas, its saints, the Vaishnav tradition, archaeology, gazetteers, revenue records, and judicial decisions.

22. A Final Message

The 2019 verdict is not the end of history — it was the conclusion of a judicial chapter. Thereafter a new era began in Ayodhya. The process of temple construction moved forward, and Ayodhya's character began to change rapidly. But many questions remain — the ancient pilgrimage sites of Ayodhya, the development of the Vaishnav monasteries, the role of the Ramanandi and other Vaishnav traditions, the true historical journey of Hanumangarhi, and the development of the akharas. The answer is clear — Ayodhya cannot be understood only through the Ramjanmabhoomi dispute. Ayodhya is far greater than that.

Principal primary reference: Supreme Court of India, M. Siddiq (D) Through LRs v. Mahant Suresh Das & Others, judgment dated 9 November 2019.

Part 6: Ayodhya after 2019 – Ram Temple Construction and a New Religious-Cultural Journey

In the previous part we examined the historic 9 November 2019 verdict of the Supreme Court. The court directed that the disputed land be given in favour of Ramlala Virajman and ordered the Central Government to constitute a trust for temple construction. A direction was also given for five acres of alternative land to be made available to the Muslim side in Ayodhya. But history does not end with a verdict.

1. The New Arrangement after the Supreme Court Verdict

Following the Supreme Court's direction, the Central Government advanced the process of constituting a trust for the construction of the Ram temple and related arrangements. On 5 February 2020, the Government of India announced the formation of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

2. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust

The purpose of the Trust was to advance the construction of the temple on the Ramjanmabhoomi and related religious and administrative arrangements. The Supreme Court had given the legal decision on the land, while responsibility for temple construction moved forward through the Trust.

3. 2020: The Bhoomi Pujan

In August 2020, the ground-breaking and foundation-laying ceremony (Bhoomi Pujan) for the temple construction took place at the Ramjanmabhoomi complex – for the first time, after decades of dispute reached judicial resolution, the work of temple construction became visibly under way.

4. The New Phase of Temple Construction

After the Bhoomi Pujan, the actual process of construction accelerated – the preparation of stone, architectural planning, construction material, structural work, and the development of the complex all moved forward.

5. Ayodhya's Broader Development

After 2019, Ayodhya's development was not confined to the Ram temple alone – roads, rail facilities, air connectivity, ghats, pilgrim facilities, dharamshalas, tourist amenities, and civic beautification all saw development in many areas.

6. 2024: The Consecration of Ramlala

22 January 2024 became one of the most significant dates in the modern history of Ayodhya. On this day, the main religious ceremony for the consecration (Pran Pratishtha) of Ramlala was held in the newly built Ram temple. Devotees across the country celebrated the occasion as a religious festival.

7. Ramlala's New Temple

The newly constructed temple presented Ayodhya's religious identity in a new form. Elements of traditional Indian temple architecture were given prominence in the design of the Ram temple.

8. Vaishnav Tradition and Ram-bhakti

Devotion to Lord Sri Ram holds an extremely important place in the Vaishnav tradition of North India. For centuries, many saints, sadhus, akharas, and monasteries in Ayodhya carried forward this tradition of Ram-bhakti – among these traditions, Bairagi sadhus and Vaishnav akharas have also been significant.

9. Beyond the Temple – the Ayodhya of Monasteries

It would be incomplete to understand Ayodhya through a single temple alone. Many monasteries, akharas, temples, and sadhu-saint traditions here have played a role in devotion, sadhana, religious education, communal feeding, service to pilgrims, and the preservation of religious traditions – this is Ayodhya's living religious culture.

10. The Continuity of Hanumangarhi

Even after the 1855 conflict, Hanumangarhi remained one of Ayodhya's principal religious centres. Today too, Hanumangarhi is a leading centre of worship of Lord Hanuman, which shows that Ayodhya's history does not begin only with 2019 or 2024.

11. The Historical Role of the Nirmohi Akhara

Its 1959 suit, the judicial process after 1989, the 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment, and the Supreme Court's final hearing in 2019 — the name of the Nirmohi Akhara appears at every one of these stages. The Supreme Court did not grant the Akhara ownership of the disputed land, but its historical religious role remains a part of Ayodhya's history.

12. Contribution to History and Legal Right

A religious institution's historical contribution is not the same as legal ownership of land, and a judicial decision on land is not a verdict on the entirety of a religious tradition's history. Both must be kept in their own place.

13. Ayodhya after 2024

After the consecration of Ramlala in the Ram temple, Ayodhya's religious journey reached a new phase. It is now also becoming an important centre for the study of history, religion, archaeology, architecture, tourism, and Indian civilisation.

14. New Possibilities for Researchers

How Hanumangarhi developed, how the institutional tradition of the Nirmohi Akhara evolved, when and how Ayodhya's various Vaishnav monasteries were established, and what influence the

Ramanandi tradition had on Ayodhya — these questions still call for serious study.

15. My Research Journey

My effort is not merely to record the present form of the Ram temple. I wish to understand Ayodhya in its complete civilisational background — not merely a dispute, not merely a temple, but a long, living tradition of Indian civilisation.

16. Why Balance Is Necessary in Research

Where religious tradition exists, it should be recorded as tradition. Where archaeological evidence exists, it should be presented as evidence. Where a court has given a decision, the court's actual conclusion should be recorded. This is the integrity of research.

17. From 1855 to 2024

1855 — the Hanumangarhi conflict. 1885 — Mahant Raghubar Das's suit. 1959 — the Nirmohi Akhara's suit. 1989 — the Ramlala Virajman suit. 1992 — the demolition of the disputed structure. 2003 — the ASI archaeological investigation. 2010 — the Allahabad High Court judgment. 2019 — the Supreme Court's unanimous verdict. 2020 — the Bhoomi Pujan toward temple construction. 2024 — the consecration of Ramlala.

18. The Most Important Message

Ayodhya's history is not merely a history of conflict — it is a history of devotion, saintly tradition, monasteries and akharas, pilgrimage, and judicial struggle, and now it is also becoming the history of a new cultural renaissance.

19. A Message for the Vaishnav Bairagis

The greatest strength of the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition lies in keeping it a living tradition — if coming generations write the history of their monasteries, preserve the lives of their saints, safeguard old documents, and carry forward education and cultural values, then history will not merely be read — it will be kept alive.

20. A Message from Ayodhya to All of India

The preservation of a civilisation does not rest on great monuments alone — it is preserved through memory, literature, temples, monasteries, saints, researchers, and, above all, the values passed on to the next generation.

Closing

This chapter-journey, beginning with the 1855 Hanumangarhi conflict, passed through the courts of 1885, the Nirmohi Akhara of 1959, the Ramlala suit of 1989, the archaeology of 2003, the High Court of 2010, and the Supreme Court of 2019. In 2020 the process of temple construction moved forward, and with the consecration of Ramlala on 22 January 2024, Ayodhya entered a

new religious chapter of the modern era. But Ayodhya's story does not end here — the question now is, what became of those Vaishnav Bairagi traditions that, for centuries, kept the monasteries, temples, akharas, and religious life of this city alive?

Part 7: The Vaishnav Bairagi Akharas and Monasteries of Ayodhya

Tradition, Service, and Cultural Heritage

Editorial note: A detailed institutional introduction to the Nirmohi, Digambar, and Nirvani Akharas, and to Hanumangarhi, has already been given in Chapter 14. It is not repeated here — the focus of this part is the role these institutions played at the level of service and heritage in the social and cultural life of Ayodhya.

In the previous six parts we traced Ayodhya's history from the 1855 Hanumangarhi conflict to the 2019 Supreme Court verdict and the new Ayodhya that followed. A natural question now arises — was the contribution of the Vaishnav Bairagis confined only to litigation, or does their role run deeper in the wider history of Ayodhya's monasteries, temples, sadhu tradition, and pilgrim service?

1. Akharas and Monasteries — Not the Same Thing

The words akhara and monastery (matha) should not always be treated as synonyms. A matha may be a religious institution

connected with a particular guru or tradition; an akhara may be part of the broader institutional structure of a sadhu-sangha. For research purposes it is more appropriate to examine the separate history of each institution.

2. The Role of the Monasteries

Ayodhya's monasteries provided the foundation for religious life over a long period – activities such as worship, recitation, katha, bhajan, sadhana, the residence of saints, and the service of devotees continued there. Many monasteries preserved local religious traditions across generations.

3. Service to Pilgrims

Travel to Ayodhya was not as easy in earlier times as it is today. Devotees coming from distant places needed lodging, food, and religious guidance. Monasteries and dharamshalas played a role in meeting this need. The history of the Vaishnav religious institutions is, therefore, not only a history of temple worship – it is also a history of pilgrim service.

4. Communal Kitchens and the Tradition of Service

In Indian saintly tradition, feeding people and hospitality toward guests are regarded as important religious acts. Arranging food for travellers and sadhus, cooperating in religious events, and providing shelter were part of this broad culture of service.

5. Education and Values

Monasteries were not merely centres of religious ritual — religious education, scriptural study, the Ramkatha, Sanskrit learning, and the guru-disciple tradition held special importance. In this way Ayodhya's religious institutions also became centres of knowledge and moral formation.

6. The Diversity of Vaishnav Traditions

Not all Vaishnav sadhus in Ayodhya belonged to a single sect. The influence of the Ramanandi tradition was very wide, but saints and monasteries of other Vaishnav traditions were also connected with Ayodhya. It would therefore not be historically accurate to say that "all the Vaishnav Bairagis of Ayodhya belonged to one and the same tradition."

7. Vaishnav Bairagis Were Not Only Ascetics

Historically, Bairagi society was not confined to renunciate sadhus alone. Various sources also record householders, priests, and other persons connected with religious institutions within the Bairagi community.

8. Religious Heritage and Social Responsibility

Religion is not worship alone — it is also connected with service, values, discipline, knowledge, hospitality, and responsibility toward

society. This is why monasteries and akharas remained important social institutions for a long time.

9. Responsibilities of These Traditions after 2019

Now that Ayodhya is becoming a world-class pilgrimage centre, the Vaishnav monasteries and akharas also face new responsibilities – they should preserve their guru-tradition, old documents, monastic histories, biographies of saints, religious texts, old images, and records.

10. Not Pride Alone – Documentation Too

If a saint established a monastery, where is the record of it? If a temple received a land grant, where is that record? These are the questions that strengthen history.

11. A Balanced Approach to History

In writing the religious history of Ayodhya, no institution should be made unnecessarily great, nor any other institution unnecessarily diminished. Each institution has its own history, each tradition its own contribution, and each claim should be judged on its own evidence.

12. The Legacy of the Vaishnav Bairagis

If Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagi legacy were to be summed up in one sentence, it could be said – "devotion, monasteries, service,

sadhana, and the continuity of religious tradition." Judicial struggle is an important chapter within this legacy, but it is not the whole story.

13. My View of Ayodhya

As a researcher, I believe Ayodhya should be seen on three levels – first, religious Ayodhya (Sri Ram, Hanumanji, the saints, and the pilgrimage); second, historical Ayodhya (monasteries, akharas, temples, ghats, inscriptions, documents, and archaeology); and third, modern Ayodhya (the Ram temple, pilgrim facilities, tourism, research, and cultural development). Only by joining these three do we arrive at the complete picture of eternal Ayodhya.

Closing

Our journey, which began at Hanumangarhi, has now reached the monasteries and akharas of Ayodhya. The history of the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition is not confined to the litigation of 1855 or 1959 alone – it lives in the bells of the temples, in the traditions of the monasteries, in the kirtan of Ram-naam, in service to pilgrims, in the guru-disciple tradition, and in the memory of the saints who devoted their lives to devotion to God and service to society. Ayodhya's future will be complete only when its present, recognising its roots, moves forward.

Part 8: The Principal Vaishnav Pilgrim Sites of Ayodhya

From Ramjanmabhoomi to Hanumangarhi, Kanak Bhavan, and the Banks of the Sarayu

Ayodhya's history is not confined to the Ramjanmabhoomi alone. The Ramjanmabhoomi is the centre of Ayodhya's religious consciousness, but around it many pilgrim sites have developed over the centuries that have shaped the religious journey of devotees.

1. Ramjanmabhoomi – Ayodhya's Central Memory

In Hindu religious tradition, Ayodhya is regarded as the birthplace of Lord Sri Ram. In the Ramayana tradition, Ayodhya is described as the capital of Kosala and as the principal city connected with the life of Lord Sri Ram. Following the Supreme Court's 2019 verdict, the way was cleared for temple construction here, and in 2024 the consecration of Ramlala took place.

2. Hanumangarhi – Lord Hanuman's Place in Ram-bhakti

Lord Hanuman is regarded as the devoted follower of Lord Sri Ram. In Ayodhya's religious tradition, Hanumanji is also revered as protector of the city. Hanumangarhi's importance is not due to the 1855 conflict alone – it remains, even today, one of Ayodhya's principal pilgrim sites.

3. Kanak Bhavan

This temple is dedicated to Lord Sri Ram and Mata Sita. Religious tradition connects Kanak Bhavan with the divine conjugal tradition of Sita and Ram. The present structure of Kanak Bhavan is considered to belong to a relatively later period, while the roots of its religious significance lie in Ayodhya's older Ram-bhakti tradition – the antiquity of the present building and the religious tradition associated with it should not be treated as one and the same matter.

4. Nageshwarnath Temple

Situated near the banks of the Sarayu, the Nageshwarnath temple is counted among Ayodhya's important religious sites. Religious tradition associates it with Lord Shiva – the city of Ram contains not only Vaishnav temples but also pilgrim sites connected with Shiva, Shakti, Surya, and other divine traditions.

5. The Sarayu River – Ayodhya's Lifeline

The Sarayu is not merely a river – it is an inseparable part of Ayodhya's religious memory. The Sarayu holds special importance in the Ramayana and Puranic tradition. Devotees visiting Ayodhya regard bathing in the Sarayu and the Sarayu aarti as an important part of their religious journey.

6. Ram ki Paidi

Developed on the bank of the Sarayu, Ram ki Paidi is today counted among Ayodhya's principal religious and cultural sites. In the modern period its ghats have seen extensive development and beautification — a distinction should therefore be maintained between the ancient religious tradition and the modern-built structures.

7. Lakshman Ghat

Among the various ghats on the Sarayu bank, Lakshman Ghat also holds religious significance. Religious belief connects it with Lakshman, the younger brother of Lord Sri Ram.

8. Bharat Kund — Ayodhya's Wider Pilgrimage Tradition

Bharat Kund is connected with the tradition of Bharat. Ayodhya's pilgrimage region is not confined to the boundaries of the city — many places in the surrounding area are connected with the memory of various events and characters of the Ramayana.

9. Dashrath Bhavan

Religious tradition connects this site with the palace of King Dashrath and the memories of the Ram family. But to declare the present structure to be the original building of the Treta Yuga would exceed the limits of historical evidence — the correct approach is to say that "religious tradition associates this site with King Dashrath."

10. Sita ki Rasoi (Sita's Kitchen)

As the name suggests, religious tradition connects this site with Mata Sita. This site shows that in Ayodhya's religious geography, it is not only the large temples that matter – small memorial sites are also significant.

11. Ayodhya's Religious Geography

Ramjanmabhoomi – the religious memory of Sri Ram's birthplace. Hanumangarhi – Hanuman devotion and the Bairagi tradition. Kanak Bhavan – devotion to Ram and Sita. Dashrath Bhavan – the memory of the Ram family. Sita ki Rasoi – the religious memory of Mata Sita. Sarayu – bathing, pilgrimage, and spiritual tradition. Ram ki Paidi – religious-cultural activity on the Sarayu bank. Nageshwarnath – the presence of the Shiva tradition in Ayodhya. Together, these constitute the religious geography of Ayodhya.

12. Where Is the Role of the Vaishnav Bairagis Seen?

In the tradition of these temples and pilgrim sites, Vaishnav Bairagi sadhus and monasteries were particularly important in the religious life connected with Ram-bhakti – in worship, katha, bhajan, pilgrim service, monastic administration, and the preservation of religious traditions.

13. Ayodhya's Temples – A Living Tradition

The greatest distinguishing feature of Ayodhya's temples is that they are not merely archaeological monuments – they remain living religious institutions, where aarti, worship, offerings, kirtan, katha, and darshan take place every day.

14. Temples and Society

The gathering of devotees on festival occasions, discourses by saints, communal feasts, religious processions, and various religious observances have continued to strengthen social bonds – temples have also remained centres of Indian communal life.

15. Ram Navami and Deepotsav

Ram Navami holds particular religious importance in Ayodhya – devotees come from across the country on the occasion of Lord Sri Ram's birth anniversary. Diwali, and the modern-day Deepotsav, have also become an important part of Ayodhya's identity.

16. Tradition and Evidence – Both Necessary

Three things should be recorded separately – religious belief (what the tradition of devotees says), historical sources (what old documents indicate), and the present structure (when the building visible today was actually constructed). Only when these three are kept distinct does history become more reliable.

17. The Need for Research in Ayodhya

Old deeds of gift, genealogies, documents relating to guru-traditions kept by the monasteries, old photographs, inscriptions, handwritten manuscripts, and administrative records can be extremely important for history.

18. Documenting Vaishnav Bairagi History

Which saint established which monastery, what is each akhara's guru-lineage, which saints lived in Ayodhya — if the answers to these questions are preserved along with documentary evidence, a very great heritage can be prepared for coming generations.

19. Ayodhya Is Not Only the Past

New temple complexes, new roads, new pilgrim-facility centres, and a growing number of devotees are giving the city a new form, but preserving the old lanes, old monasteries, old ghats, and saintly traditions is equally necessary.

20. A Researcher's Pledge

Where religious tradition exists, it will be clearly called tradition. Where historical evidence exists, evidence will be given. Where historians disagree, the disagreements will not be concealed.

21. Ayodhya for the Coming Generation

Ram-bhakti, knowledge of history, respect for saints, the preservation of monastic tradition, the conservation of archaeology,

the cleanliness of the Sarayu, and open doors for research — this would be genuine cultural preservation.

Conclusion

The Ramjanmabhoomi is its central symbol. Hanumangarhi is an important centre of its devotional and saintly tradition. Kanak Bhavan keeps alive the devotion to Ram and Sita. The Sarayu is Ayodhya's spiritual lifeline. And countless monasteries, temples, akharas, and ashrams carry forward this city's living religious tradition. Ayodhya, therefore, must be understood not merely as a place, but as a living civilisation.

Part 9: The Saintly Tradition of Ayodhya

The Contribution of the Ramanandi, Vaishnav Bairagi, and Other Traditions

Editorial note: An institutional introduction to the Nirmohi and Digambar Akharas and the Bairagi tradition of Hanumangarhi has already been given in Chapter 14 and in Parts 1–7 of this chapter. The focus here is the philosophical distinction between the various streams of Vaishnav saints — particularly the Ramanandi and the Nimbark — so that the two may be understood without being conflated.

Ayodhya's identity was not built by its temples alone. The soul of this city is also visible in its saints, sadhus, acharyas, monasteries, and guru-disciple traditions.

1. The Ramanandi Tradition

Among the most influential saintly traditions of Ram-bhakti in North India, the Ramanandi tradition is prominent. This tradition is traditionally traced to Swami Ramanand. Ramanandi sadhus regard devotion to Lord Sri Ram and Mata Sita as the central foundation of their religious life.

2. Ramanand and His Tradition

Scholars hold differing views regarding the life and historical details of Swami Ramanand, so it would not be right to regard every account of his life as equally well-established historical fact. But it is clear that a broad saintly tradition of Ram-bhakti developed in North India, and that Ayodhya remained one of the principal religious centres of this tradition.

3. Vaishnav Bairagis and the Ramanandis

The words "Ramanandi" and "Bairagi" are not fully synonymous in every context. Ramanandi is a specific Vaishnav religious tradition, while the word "Bairagi" has been used more broadly for Vaishnav renunciate traditions and, at times, for social groups associated with them.

4. The Vaishnav Saints' Tradition of Service

The contribution of Ayodhya's saints was not confined to worship alone – religious institutions arranged food, shelter, religious guidance, katha, bhajan, and service for pilgrims. An important dimension of the saintly tradition was, therefore, also public service.

5. The Guru-Disciple Tradition

From guru to disciple passed mantra, methods of sadhana, religious knowledge, conduct, and tradition. The disciple would then carry that same tradition forward to the next generation.

6. Katha and the Tradition of Ramcharit

Ideals such as truth, duty, sacrifice, fraternal love, propriety, and statecraft, drawn from the life of Ram, were carried to society. Saints conveyed these values to ordinary people through katha, discourse, and bhajan.

7. The Influence of the Tulsi Tradition

Goswami Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas played an extraordinary role in carrying the Ramkatha, in the vernacular language, to a wide popular audience. However, it would not be right to treat every local legend connected with the life of Tulsidas as historical evidence.

8. The Nimbark Tradition

The Nimbark tradition is known for devotion to Lord Sri Krishna and Sri Radha and for the Dvaitadvaita philosophy. Its principal religious centre has not been Ayodhya but, more broadly, the Braj region. Nevertheless, in understanding the wider Vaishnav religious world of Ayodhya, independent mention of the Nimbark tradition is necessary.

9. Respecting Distinct Traditions

It would not be historically accurate to describe the Ramanandi and Nimbark traditions as one and the same sect. The principal focus of the Ramanandi tradition is devotion to Sri Ram and Sita; the principal focus of the Nimbark tradition is devotion to Radha and Krishna together with Dvaitadvaita philosophy. Both are Vaishnav traditions, but each has its own independent guru-lineage, philosophical background, and religious practice — maintaining this distinction is necessary from a research standpoint.

10. Diversity in Ayodhya

There is Ram-bhakti, there is Hanuman-bhakti, there is Shiva worship, there are various Vaishnav traditions, there are the monasteries of saints, there are akharas, there are ghats, and

there is katha and kirtan — to confine Ayodhya to a single institution or a single sect would diminish its true religious history.

11. The Challenge of Documented History

Much information comes from oral tradition, local legends, monastic genealogies, and religious texts. Religious memory is extremely important within these, but the historian must also examine what written or archaeological evidence supports a given claim.

12. Three Types of Sources

Religious sources (the Ramayana, the Puranas, saintly literature, sectarian texts), historical sources (gazetteers, travellers' accounts, administrative records, old documents), and judicial and modern sources (court judgments, government records, archaeological reports, modern research). A more balanced history can be prepared only by drawing on all three together.

13. The Greatest Gift of Ayodhya's Saints

Kingdoms changed, rule changed, time changed, society changed — but the religious tradition of Ram-bhakti continued to advance through various saints, monasteries, and devotees. This continuity is Ayodhya's greatest cultural strength.

14. The Responsibility of Vaishnav Bairagi Society

Do not write your history only as a tale of glory – preserve the evidence alongside it. Which saint did what, where, and when, and what is the source – if the answers to these questions are preserved with documentation, the community's history will be that much stronger.

15. The Purpose of My Research

To present Ayodhya's saintly tradition not on the basis of religious devotion alone, but on the basis of available sources – where the evidence is strong, it will be stated clearly; where there is tradition, it will be called tradition; and where there is disagreement, both sides will be presented to the reader.

Conclusion

Ayodhya's saintly tradition is like a vast tree – its roots lie in ancient religious memory, its trunk is the tradition of Ram-bhakti, its branches are the various saintly sects and monasteries, and its leaves are the millions of devotees who, even today, remember the name of Ram in Ayodhya. The Ramanandi, Vaishnav Bairagi, Nimbark, and other Vaishnav streams each hold their own distinct identity while enriching the broader religious world of Ayodhya. Understanding this diversity is itself understanding Ayodhya.

Part 10: The Saints, Monasteries, and Social Service of Ayodhya

The Journey of the Vaishnav Bairagi Tradition from Religion to Society

If Ayodhya's saintly tradition were seen only in terms of temples and religious rituals, an important dimension would be missed. In India's saintly tradition, religion has never meant worship alone — service, hospitality, food-giving, education, values, help for pilgrims, and responsibility toward society have also been bound up with it.

1. Monasteries Were Not Only Places of Sadhana

Saints resided in monasteries, religious texts were studied there, devotees received religious guidance, pilgrims received shelter, and on many occasions food and other necessary services were also made available.

2. Pilgrims and Ayodhya

In earlier times, devotees coming from distant places had to undertake long journeys, and arrangements for lodging and food along the way were not always easy. In such times, dharamshalas and monasteries became important places of shelter for pilgrims.

3. The Tradition of Food-Giving

In a pilgrim city like Ayodhya, sadhus and devotees arriving from across the country depended on arrangements for food. Communal feasts (bhandaras) and food-service organised by various religious institutions have been part of this broad tradition.

4. The Importance of Dharamshalas

The purpose of a dharamshala was not merely to provide a building – it gave the pilgrim security, shelter, and convenience for a period of time.

5. Service and Vaishnav Philosophy

A devotee does not regard service to God as confined to the temple idol alone – serving sadhus, serving guests, and helping the needy may also be regarded as religious duty. It was this broad spirit that gave rise to service institutions at pilgrim centres.

6. Katha – a Medium of Popular Education

At a time when modern institutions of education were not widely available, religious discourse (katha) was an effective medium for conveying ideas to society. Through the Ramkatha, saints imparted teachings of truth, duty, sacrifice, brotherhood, propriety, and dharma.

7. The Tradition of Values

Monasteries and saintly society carried forward values such as good conduct, respect for elders, respect for the guru, religious discipline, charity, service, and self-restraint.

8. Preservation of Religious Literature

Copies of the Ramayana, the Puranas, devotional literature, saintly compositions, and texts of various sects were kept preserved in religious institutions over long periods.

9. Preservation of Oral Tradition

A large part of the stories of saints, the guru-disciple tradition, and local religious history was carried forward orally. This oral history is important, but in modern research it must be considered alongside other available sources.

10. A Pilgrimage Tradition that Connects Society

A person coming to Ayodhya may come from any part of the country — languages differ, dress differs, but devotion to Sri Ram connects them through a shared cultural feeling.

11. From Service to Social Responsibility

Today, if they choose, religious institutions can also advance work such as education for poor children, libraries, health camps, cleanliness, environmental protection, de-addiction, moral education, and social awareness.

12. The Cleanliness of the Sarayu

If a devotee regards the Sarayu as sacred, keeping it clean should also be part of their religious duty — protecting the sacred river is itself a form of service.

13. Preservation of the Monasteries' Records

If Ayodhya's old religious institutions hold old documents, genealogies, deeds of gift, photographs, or manuscripts, their preservation is extremely important – every document may be a link in history.

14. New Responsibility in the Digital Age

Monasteries and religious institutions can prepare digital scans, photographic records, chronological lists, and subject-wise archives of their records. This would greatly assist future researchers.

15. Connecting the Younger Generation with History

Not every viral claim is history, not every old photograph is evidence, not every oral story is a document. Research begins with asking questions.

16. The Meaning of National Consciousness

National consciousness does not mean opposition to any other community. It means understanding one's own culture, safeguarding one's heritage, studying one's history, and fulfilling one's responsibility toward society.

17. The Modern Responsibility of the Vaishnav Bairagi Tradition

Alongside taking pride in their historical identity, education, values, service, the preservation of history, and guidance of the young can be promoted within society.

18. In My View, the Greatest Legacy of the Vaishnav Bairagis

Connecting devotion with life, connecting religion with service, connecting values with society, and carrying tradition forward to the next generation — this is the legacy that keeps any society alive.

Conclusion

The history of Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagis is not confined to conflict and litigation alone. Their tradition included devotion, renunciation, service, food-giving, respect for pilgrims, religious education, values, and a spirit of bringing society together. Today the need is that this legacy should not be left merely as a story of the past — it should be connected to the needs of modern society. That poor children should be educated, that the young should acquire values, that old documents should be preserved, that rivers should remain clean, that the dignity of pilgrim sites should be maintained, and that history, backed by evidence, should reach coming generations. This is the true strength of the Sanatan tradition.

Part 11: The Documentary Record of Ayodhya's History

Gazetteers, Travellers' Accounts, Administrative Records, and Archaeology

When writing a book on any historical subject, the most important question is – "What is the evidence for what we are writing?" On Ayodhya we find many kinds of material – religious texts, local traditions, saintly genealogies, monastic records, travellers' accounts, British-era gazetteers, revenue records, judicial documents, archaeological reports, and modern scholarship. It would not be right to treat all these sources as of the same evidentiary weight.

1. Religious Texts – Ayodhya's Ancient Memory

The Valmiki Ramayana contains a detailed description of Ayodhya, presenting it as the capital of Kosala. The Puranas, too, contain descriptions of Ayodhya and its religious significance.

2. The Skanda Purana and the Ayodhya Mahatmya

This text describes the various pilgrim sites of Ayodhya and their religious importance. But a place's religious significance as described in a religious text and the construction date of its present building are not the same matter – religious tradition and architectural history should be read separately.

3. The Historical Use of the Puranas

References to Ayodhya and its related religious traditions are found in the Vishnu Purana, the Padma Purana, and other Puranas. Modern historians also take into account their textual formation, period of composition, and various recensions.

4. Travellers' Accounts and Their Limits

Travellers visiting India from time to time described cities, temples, and religious sites. But in what language a traveller was writing, how many days they spent there, and whether their information was first-hand or reported – these questions must be examined, so travellers' accounts should be read alongside other sources.

5. Colonial Gazetteers

Gazetteers recorded, by administrative officers, information about a district or region's geography, population, religion, land arrangements, temples, monasteries, revenue, and administration. Since Ayodhya long formed part of the Faizabad administrative area, the relevant Faizabad gazetteers become important sources – but gazetteers, too, were products of their time and of an administrative viewpoint.

6. The Studies of William Crooke and R. V. Russell

The British official and ethnographer William Crooke, in The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh (1896), provided material on the social and religious character of the

Bairagis and Vaishnav traditions. R. V. Russell and Hira Lal's The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India is a similarly important colonial-era source. These should be read as reflecting the particular perspective of the colonial period, not taken as a specific history of Ayodhya.

7. Administrative and Judicial Records

Land records, documents relating to grants, revenue records, and official correspondence can provide important information about the actual administrative position of a religious institution. Judicial records are distinctive in that they contain the parties' claims, documents, testimony, earlier judgments, and the court's legal reasoning – the 1885 Mahant Raghubar Das suit and the 2019 Supreme Court verdict are prominent examples.

8. The Court's Approach

The Supreme Court's verdict was not based on religious texts alone – the court carried out a legal examination of many kinds of evidence, which is why the 2019 verdict has become an extremely important primary source for the study of modern Ayodhya history.

9. The Role of Archaeology

Archaeology gives us an opportunity to understand the past on the basis of physical evidence hidden beneath the ground and

within older structures — structural remains, pillars, bricks, pottery, craftsmanship, and other archaeological material are studied.

10. The ASI's 2003 Excavation

The excavation conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 2003, and its report, held particular significance and were later placed before the judicial proceedings for consideration. In understanding any archaeological finding, the actual language of the report and the experts' conclusions must be examined.

11. Archaeology and Religious Identity

Archaeology can provide evidence about the remains of a structure, but establishing a connection between those remains and a particular historical figure or religious event may require other sources as well — it is more appropriate to read archaeology together with records, literature, and historical context.

12. Revenue Records, Maps, and Inscriptions

Revenue records can show how a piece of land was recorded administratively. Old maps can show where a temple, monastery, or ghat stood. Inscriptions, if they mention a name, date, donor, or event, can serve as direct evidence — but their authenticity and text require expert examination.

13. Monastic Genealogies, Photographs, and Newspapers

These record the guru-to-disciple tradition, show the earlier appearance of temples and ghats, and provide contemporary accounts of events. But all of these should be read together with other sources, since genealogies, photographs, and newspapers each come with their own context and limitations.

14. Categorising Sources and Reading Opposing Sources

Religious tradition, local tradition, administrative records, judicial records, archaeological evidence, and the views of modern historians should not all be placed in the same category. If two sources say different things, the researcher should not simply choose the favourable source and discard the other — both should be read and compared.

15. The Historian's Responsibility

It is not the historian's task to pronounce a verdict — finding sources, examining them, comparing them, noting disagreements, and placing the evidence before the reader is what constitutes historical research.

16. A Researcher's Small Checklist

Where did this information come from? How old is the source? Is it a first-hand account or information received from someone else? Do other sources confirm it? Is there also evidence to the

contrary? When the answers to these five questions are clear, history becomes more solid.

Conclusion

To write an authentic history of Ayodhya, faith alone is not enough, archaeology alone is not enough, a court's verdict alone does not convey the entire religious tradition, and old scriptures alone cannot explain modern administrative history. Religious texts tell us about tradition, records tell us about administration, courts tell us about legal history, archaeology gives us evidence of the physical past, and the saintly tradition explains to us a living cultural continuity. Only by holding all of these together does the complete picture of eternal Ayodhya emerge.

Part 13: The Vaishnav Bairagis of Ayodhya – Tradition of Service and National Consciousness

From Temples to Society – the Legacy of Devotion, Service, Education, and Values

Editorial note: The Nirmohi, Digambar, and Nirvani Akharas are not repeated here, as they have already been described in detail in Chapter 14.

It would be incomplete to understand the history of Ayodhya only through conflicts and litigation. The true strength of this city has also lain in its living saintly tradition.

1. Service Alongside Devotion

In Indian saintly tradition, service too has been regarded as an important part of religious life – welcoming guests, feeding sadhus, sheltering pilgrims, and helping the needy were all connected with dharma and merit.

2. Service to Pilgrims and Food-Giving

In earlier times, travellers coming to Ayodhya faced many difficulties. Religious institutions and dharamshalas became an important support for them. A person coming to a communal feast received not merely food but a sense of belonging.

3. The Shelter of Sadhus and Saints

Ayodhya has for centuries been a centre attracting sadhus and saints. Saints came here from various parts of the country, bringing about a confluence of different regional religious streams in Ayodhya's saintly tradition.

4. Ramkatha, Popular Education, and the Teaching of Values

Through the Ramkatha, saints taught values such as truth, propriety, duty, sacrifice, brotherhood, and dharma. Emphasis was placed on values such as respect for parents, respect for the guru, truthfulness, non-violence, charity, service, self-restraint, and good conduct.

5. Preservation of Religious Literature and Oral Tradition

Monasteries and saintly traditions have been important in preserving religious literature. At the same time, a large part of saints' stories, the guru-disciple tradition, and local religious history was carried forward orally, and this must be examined in modern research alongside other available sources.

6. The Dharamshala – a Centre of Service

Dharamshalas were not merely places to spend the night – they could also become centres of religious and social contact for travellers.

7. A Pilgrimage Tradition that Connects Society

A person coming to Ayodhya may come from any part of the country – languages and dress differ, but devotion to Sri Ram connects them through a shared cultural feeling.

8. Saints' Journeys and Cultural Contact

The travels of saints played a role in connecting different regions. Ayodhya was, therefore, never merely a local religious town – it remained part of a wider Indian pilgrimage network.

9. From Service to Social Responsibility

Today, if they choose, religious institutions can advance work such as education for poor children, libraries, health camps, cleanliness,

environmental protection, de-addiction, moral education, and social awareness.

10. The Cleanliness of the Sarayu

If a devotee regards the Sarayu as sacred, keeping it clean should also be part of their religious duty – protecting the sacred river is itself a form of service.

11. Modern Pilgrimage and Old Tradition

Modern facilities are developing rapidly in Ayodhya today, but alongside this development it is also necessary to preserve the old saintly tradition – development and heritage are not opposed to one another.

12. Preservation of the Monasteries' Records and Digital-Age Responsibility

Every document may be a link in history. Today, preserving old documents through mobile phones and digital cameras is easier than ever before.

13. Connecting the Younger Generation with History

Not every viral claim is history, not every old photograph is evidence, not every oral story is a document. Research begins with asking questions.

14. The Meaning of National Consciousness

National consciousness does not mean opposition to any other community – it means understanding one's own culture, safeguarding one's heritage, studying one's history, and fulfilling one's responsibility toward society.

15. Religion and Society

Many examples from Indian saintly tradition show that compassion, service, and concern for public welfare have been bound up with religion. Carrying forward this positive dimension is today's need.

16. The Modern Responsibility of the Vaishnav Bairagi Tradition

Alongside taking pride in their historical identity, education, values, service, the preservation of history, and the guidance of the young can be promoted – this can be the modern path to keeping the tradition alive.

17. Ayodhya – a Living Heritage

Ayodhya cannot be seen merely as an archaeological site. Worship still takes place here, the name of Ram still resounds, saints still live here, devotees still come, and generations-old traditions continue alongside modern life.

18. In My View, the Greatest Legacy of the Vaishnav Bairagis

Connecting devotion with life, connecting religion with service, connecting values with society, and carrying tradition forward to

the next generation — this is the legacy that keeps any society alive.

Conclusion

The history of Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagis is not confined to conflict and litigation alone. Their tradition included devotion, renunciation, service, food-giving, respect for pilgrims, religious education, values, and a spirit of bringing society together. Today the need is that poor children should be educated, the young should acquire values, old documents should be preserved, rivers should remain clean, the dignity of pilgrim sites should be maintained, and history, backed by evidence, should reach coming generations. This is the true strength of the Sanatan tradition, and this is also our true tribute to the saints and to the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition of Ayodhya.

Part 14: Ayodhya and the Vaishnav Bairagi Tradition — A New Chapter Today, after History

9 November 2019 is recorded as a decisive turning point in the modern history of Ayodhya. But after any historic verdict, a new question is born — what now? How is history to be preserved? How is the pilgrimage site's dignity to be maintained? How is the saintly tradition to be carried forward to the new generation?

1. A New Direction after 2019

After the Supreme Court's verdict, a new phase of development began in Ayodhya – the way was opened for temple construction on the Ramjanmabhoomi, and special attention began to be given to Ayodhya's infrastructure, transport, pilgrim facilities, and tourism development.

2. The Ram Temple – Faith and Architecture

The Ram temple is today the centre of the faith of millions of devotees – and also an example of the blending of Indian architecture, religious art, craftsmanship, and modern construction technique. But alongside the present construction of the temple, it is also necessary to preserve Ayodhya's older religious heritage.

3. Do Not Forget the Old Ayodhya

Ghats, ancient temples, monasteries, dharamshalas, kunds, the memories of saints, old lanes – all of these together form Ayodhya's true cultural identity.

4. The Role of the Saintly Tradition, and from Pilgrimage to Centre of Knowledge

The role of saints and religious institutions has not ended in modern Ayodhya. It would not be enough to regard Ayodhya merely as a place of darshan – it can also be developed as an important centre for the study of Indian religion, culture, history,

and archaeology, where research institutes, libraries, archives, museums, and digital research centres can be established.

5. Preservation of Vaishnav Literature and Documentation of Saints' Biographies

Digital copies, cataloguing, and scientific preservation of old texts are necessary. In preparing the biographies of saints, documents relating to birth and life, the guru-tradition, monastic records, old photographs, and contemporary news should be studied.

6. Recording Oral History

Often the most important information about an old monastery or saint lies with an elderly sadhu or a family. When recording it, it should be made clear who is speaking, whether the information is first-hand or heard from someone else, and whether any independent evidence is available.

7. Digital Ayodhya and Ayodhya for the Young

In a digital archive, old documents, monastic records, old photographs, maps, inscriptions, and historical research can be preserved. Today's youth engage with history through video and social media, so history, backed by evidence, must also be presented through modern media.

8. Balancing Tourism and Pilgrimage

A tourist comes to see a place; a pilgrim comes with faith. Ayodhya can become a centre for both, but development should be such that the religious atmosphere and historical heritage retain their dignity.

9. Cleanliness Is Also Service – Protecting the Sarayu

Cleanliness of the ghats, waste management, plastic control, and clean drinking water are directly connected with the dignity of the pilgrimage site. If we keep the city of Ram clean, that too is a form of service to Ram. Sarayu conservation should be a leading priority for Ayodhya's future.

10. Viewing History above Politics

Ayodhya's history is extremely sensitive. Where evidence exists, it should be presented; where there is disagreement, it should be noted; and where facts are disputed, caution should be exercised – this is intellectual honesty toward history.

11. The Need for Libraries, Research Centres, and Museums

Research centres should be developed in Ayodhya where old gazetteers, historical books, judicial decisions, archaeological reports, and maps are available. Museums can display old coins, inscriptions, sculpture, and the history of the monasteries.

12. A New Generation of History

If we preserve documents today, the historians of the coming generation will be able to understand our time – the record we make today will be tomorrow's history.

13. The Purpose of My Book

To understand Ayodhya in the complete context of history, religion, archaeology, literature, pilgrimage, saintly tradition, and Indian civilisation – where views differ, that disagreement will also be given space; where evidence is available, it will be presented.

14. From an Ordinary Person to a Researcher

Born into an ordinary family, I served in the Indian Army. After leaving the army, my inclination turned toward the study of history and Sanatan culture – this work is not merely writing, but an effort to preserve the memory of one's civilisation.

15. To the Coming Generation

Who was Ram? What is the ancient history of Ayodhya? What is the significance of the Sarayu? How did the saintly tradition develop? What were the events of 1855 and 1885? What was the true nature of the 2019 verdict? And where is the evidence for all these questions? – these questions will mark the beginning of research.

Conclusion

The 2019 verdict is an important milestone in Ayodhya's judicial journey, but Ayodhya's civilisational journey is far greater than that. Today the need is for the temple to be built and the heritage to be preserved; for the pilgrimage to develop and the Sarayu to remain clean; for tourism to grow and the old lanes to remain safe; for modern facilities to arrive and the saintly tradition to remain alive; for new buildings to be constructed and old documents to be preserved as well. And most important of all – that Ayodhya's history, together with faith, should also reach coming generations on the basis of evidence. The past is our pride, the present our responsibility, and the future our test. Only if we can preserve our culture, our pilgrim sites, our saints, and our historical sources will we be able to hand down to the coming generation a living and well-documented eternal Ayodhya.

About the Author

Naresh Das Vaishnav Nimbark

Retired Honorary Naib Subedar, Indian Army | Historian | Researcher | Author

Honorary Naib Subedar (Retd) Naresh Das Vaishnav 'Nimbark' was born into an ordinary family in the historic town of Ramnagar, Gannaur, District Sonipat, Haryana. He served the nation in the Indian Army for 24 years – from Operation Vijay to international service in the year 2000 under the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Sierra Leone, West Africa. It was in that difficult hour, when he was taken captive by militants in Sierra Leone, that he resolved that after retirement he would set down the rifle and take up the pen, to bring to light the forgotten history of the Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi tradition.

Following his retirement from the army, after 18 years of dedicated research, pilgrimages, and the study of rare manuscripts, he has published 18 books (8 in Hindi and 10 in English), available across more than 190 countries through Amazon, Flipkart, and Notion Press. These works bring to light the glorious chapters of Veer Banda Bairagi, Jagadguru Nimbarkacharya, the Vaishnav Bairagi kings, and the Bairagi princely states of Chuikhadan and Rajnandgaon – chapters that have not found due recognition in mainstream history.

He holds evidence, sources, and fact as paramount in the writing of history, and is a firm advocate of maintaining a clear distinction between faith and history. As founder-editor of the free monthly e-magazine 'Sanatan Bharat – Naya Savera,' he continues his ongoing effort to bring Sanatan Dharma, the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition, and Indian cultural consciousness to the public. His singular purpose is to revive the history of the forgotten warriors and saints of the Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi tradition, who lived and died for Mother India.

The Author's Published Books

According to the author's official website (www.nareshswaminimbark.in), a total of 18 books (8 Hindi + 10 English) have been published to date. The principal titles published in both languages are listed below:

Hindi Books

Jagatguru Nimbarkacharyaji: Sanatan ke Surya

Ramnagar: 422 Varshon ka Ansuna Itihas

Ranbhoomi se Teerthbhoomi tak: Ek Sainik ki Amar Gatha

Mahant Bane Maharaja: Vaishnav Bairagi Rajaon ka Itihas

Yatra: Bandook se Kalam tak

Swarnprasth ki Gatha – Sonipat ka 3526 Varsh Purana Ansuna Mahabharatkalin Itihas

Sanatan Kurukshetra – Srishti, Saraswati aur Bhagwan Shri Krishna ki Amar Bhoomi

(Title of the eighth Hindi book is pending verification.)

English Books

Rosary and the Throne: The Vaishnav Bairagi Rulers

Jagatguru Nimbarkacharya: The Sun of Sanatan Dharma

Ramnagar: 422 Years of Untold History

The Royal Legacy of the Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagis

The Vaishnav Bairagi Kings of India: Warrior Saints of Sanatan Dharma

Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi: Warriors and Soldiers (Forgotten Warriors and Soldiers)

Nimbark Sampraday: Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi Tradition

Ranbhoomi se Teerthbhoomi tak: Ek Sainik ki Amar Gatha

Mahant Bane Maharaja: Sanatan Vaishnav Bairagi Parampara

Sanatan Kurukshetra: Creation, Saraswati, and the Immortal Land of Lord Shri Krishna

(This list has been prepared according to the author's website. For the complete and most up-to-date list, please visit www.nareshswaminimbark.in/books. The present research volume, 'Sanatan Ayodhya: The Birthplace of Sri Ram and Indian Civilisation,' is not included in this list, as it is currently in publication.)

Epilogue

Ayodhya is not merely a town – it is the name of that unbroken memory of Indian civilisation which has been shaped over centuries by the sadhana of saints, the dharma of kings, the pen of poets, the discernment of the courts, and the devotion of millions of believers. In this research volume, we have attempted to understand Ayodhya not merely as a dispute, nor merely as a temple, but as a living civilisation – where everything, from the poetry of the Ramayana to the verdict of the Supreme Court, from the Vaishnav Bairagi tradition to modern archaeology, is woven together.

In writing this book, my sole effort has been that, while honouring faith, the dignity of history should also be preserved. Where evidence was available, evidence has been given. Where there is tradition, it has been presented as tradition. And where scholars disagree, that disagreement has been placed honestly before

readers rather than concealed. This is the true test of any serious work of research.

As a soldier, I learned to guard borders. As a researcher, I have come to understand that guarding the memories of a civilisation is an equally sacred duty. This book is a combined offering of both those sentiments – discipline and devotion.

This volume concludes here, but the story of Ayodhya does not end here. In the volume to come, we shall go deeper into Ayodhya's Vaishnav Bairagi akharas, the detailed guru-tradition of its monasteries, its ancient pilgrim sites, and those historical documents that still await research.

To all the saints, mahants, historians, jurists, and readers whose support and blessing I have received on this journey, I express my heartfelt gratitude. And, above all, this humble effort is respectfully offered at the feet of Lord Sri Ram.

Om Sri Sitaramachandrarpanamastu.

Jai Sri Ram. Jai Sri Radhe Radhe. Jai Sri Nimbarkacharya. Jai Hind, Jai Bharat.